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# RUSSIA'S POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY

A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World

**VIATCHESLAV MOROZOV**



## Russia's Postcolonial Identity

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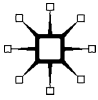
# Russia's Postcolonial Identity

**A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World**

Viatcheslav Morozov

*Professor of EU-Russia Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia*

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# Abbreviations

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EU	European Union
G8	Group of Eight
IR	International Relations
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
RSCT	regional security complex theory
RT	<i>Russia Today</i>
UN	United Nations
US	United States

# Introduction

The main point this book makes is rather straightforward: I argue that Russia must be viewed as a subaltern empire. This idea is not completely new, but its implications are strangely overlooked in the literature – or, rather, in many literatures for which this point is of some considerable significance. The aspect that does not get enough attention is of course not the imperial one – Russian imperialism has been studied from many perspectives, including those which are considered in this book. It is the subaltern side of Russia's condition that in my view is not properly reflected upon. This is the reason, and the only reason, why this book stresses the subaltern part of the formula. I believe that both are equally important, and most of the time, I try to demonstrate that they are mutually constitutive. However, it is only the subaltern side that I analyse in detail, outsourcing the examination of the imperial element to the existing literature and the reader's prior knowledge.

In postcolonial theory, the term 'subaltern' refers to disenfranchised individuals and groups, those whose agency is limited and who are deprived by the hegemonic social order of the possibility to make their voices heard. Applying it to any state, let alone to one as powerful as Russia, is certainly a controversial idea. Nevertheless, as I postulate in Chapter 1 and substantiate in subsequent chapters, there is more than one respect in which this concept is relevant for the analysis of Russian politics and Russia's position in international society.

I also demonstrate that Russia's subalternity has both material and ideational dimensions and thus needs to be analysed as a complex phenomenon. The duality implied in this statement, however, is analytical rather than ontological: I believe that in any social practice the material and the ideational intermingle and condition each other. The differentiation is necessary first and foremost for the sake of correcting the bias,

evident in both postcolonial and constructivist literature, in favour of such phenomena as culture, identity and discourse, while not enough attention is being paid to economic and social structures.

The 'must' in the opening sentence definitely does not signify a claim to exclusive ownership of truth: it is not meant to suggest that subaltern empire as a conceptual lens could lay the foundation for a theory in the narrow sense, a set of assumptions and hypotheses that would deliver conclusive answers to the questions that this book struggles with. It is also not an enticement to create a new theory in the broad sense, as a mode of theoretical reasoning based on certain ontological and epistemological premises. Important as it is, the Russian case is still just an empirical case, and looking at it can do no more than generate certain new dynamism in the existing theoretical debates. Thus, arguing that Russia must be viewed as a subaltern empire is an invitation, addressed to scholars working in several rather disjointed theoretical traditions. Its meaning differs depending on the tradition in question, but it is my hope that in all of these contexts accepting my invitation would result in productive tension between the theory-specific common sense and the implications of applying the theory to the Russian case.

This book is primarily situated within the disciplinary field of International Relations (IR), in as much as the concept of subaltern empire suggests a certain positioning of a state in the international system, and not just a particular 'internal' structure of governance. My treatment of subaltern empire as a concept and an empirical phenomenon is mostly focused at the interaction between domestic context and international developments. As I show in Chapter 2, this is where the value added in using this approach is the greatest, at least as far as Russia is concerned. Pitching it this way allows to conceptualise subaltern empire as an outcome of uneven and combined development and to observe the effects of the latter at all levels, from trade flows to identity politics. It also suggests viewing local structures of oppression as conditioned by global inequalities and critically reassessing the manifold appeals against injustice that we hear on a daily basis. Finally, it provides a solid ground for modest generalisation and cross-national comparison.

At the same time, I find any strict separation between domestic politics and foreign policy rather counterproductive, at least when dealing with the issues I am interested in. I see Russian politics as an integral phenomenon which has domestic and international dimensions, yet those can be distinguished only analytically and should by no means be reified. Consequently, it is my conceptual focus, rather than the disciplinary logic per se, that defines my choice of topics and the other

approaches I engage with. There are two broad fields for which I see my argument as particularly relevant: postcolonial studies (especially postcolonial approaches to IR) and Russian studies (above all constructivist Russian foreign policy studies). My main point (Russia must be viewed as a subaltern empire) can be reformulated in disciplinary terms as suggesting that these two bodies of literature must overlap to a considerable extent. However, a look at the current state of the discipline reveals the opposite: Russian foreign policy is *not* studied from the postcolonial perspective (manifold texts accusing Moscow of engaging in imperial pursuits in the post-Soviet space obviously do not count).

My project is therefore also about building bridges between two fields that stand to benefit from mutual engagement. The benefits, though, come in a rather uncomfortable form: instead of filling the gaps, the bridging in this case produces tensions and inconveniences. As a result, I do not always have ready answers to the questions I raise, but I see generating tension and asking uneasy questions as a worthy exercise in itself.

In the process, I also deal with a number of other approaches, some of which help me to formulate my argument (poststructuralist political theory, world-systems theory, constructivism), while others (multiple modernities literature, civilisational approach, English School) are critically reassessed from the point of view of the book. This point of view is necessarily limited: I do not question the core assumptions and the underlying logic of any of these schools but rather try to show what they can and cannot achieve if applied to the study of contemporary Russia. By doing that, I am paying tribute to the professional standards, which require a scholar introducing this or that conceptual toolkit to demonstrate that it works 'better' than available alternatives. It is also essential, however, for situating the book in a more precise way. In the end, I do not see it as belonging to either postcolonial studies, poststructuralism or constructivism. Rather – very much like Russia itself – this book is located in the interstice between various hegemonically organised fields, teasing them out to face the empirical developments that they so far have largely disregarded, but refusing to be fully appropriated by any of the approaches.

As long as the book does not have any precise disciplinary coordinates and as long as there is little common ground between the two main perspectives that it engages with, it cannot have one single and self-sufficient introduction. As I mentioned before, the main point of the book (Russia must be viewed as a subaltern empire) has different meanings depending on the context in which it is made. Therefore, this

argument is introduced twice: in Chapter 1, this is done in the context of postcolonial studies. Here, its meaning can be unpacked in several related ways. Firstly, it is a claim that subaltern empires do exist: that having own colonial periphery does not prevent a country from simultaneously being incorporated in the hegemonic order as a subaltern who retains its sovereignty and thus is not colonised in the formal sense. Secondly, it is a suggestion that looking at Russia as a subaltern (and not just as a colonial empire) actually creates productive tension within the postcolonial paradigm. This tension, in particular, relates to its normative agenda: I argue throughout the book that a voice claiming to speak in the name of the subaltern must not be endowed with unquestionable moral authority. Speaking in the name of the subaltern is what Russia (as a state) does all the time, demonstrating the full spectrum of subversive techniques that scholars of postcolony normally associate with postcolonial hybridity and the agency of the subaltern. And yet, each claim made in the name of the subaltern consolidates the oppressive authoritarian regime within Russia and thus reinforces its imperial order. Thus, Chapter 1 formulates the problem of the representation of the subaltern as one of the central themes of this book. It also discusses one of the most influential conceptual frameworks in the study of Russia as a peripheral country – internal colonisation – and its failure to see the external forces at work in the phenomena that it describes.

Chapter 2 introduces my argument from the point of view of Russian foreign policy studies – very broadly understood. As I stressed above, I see domestic politics and foreign policy as two sides of a single political phenomenon, which is in turn conditioned by global developments. I am predominantly interested in the approaches that share the same view. I mostly focus on constructivist accounts, with constructivism defined very loosely, to differentiate reflectivist approaches from rationalist IR theory. This selection is due to the fact that only this type of foreign policy scholarship is capable of a meaningful dialogue with postcolonialism on the basis of the latter's key concepts, such as subalternity, hybridity and Eurocentrism. In this context, the key message of the book must be read to the effect that direct engagement with postcolonial theory could significantly enhance our understanding of Russian political developments, both domestic and foreign policy related. As the chapter suggests, the existing literature has already provided us with a good understanding of Russian identity politics and made some progress in analysing the consequences of Russia's place in the international system for its domestic situation and foreign policy-making. This is where, in my view, using postcolonial approach could

help streamline conceptual confusion and provide more solid ground for comparative research. With this in mind, the chapter discusses potential benefits of viewing Russia as a subaltern empire in comparison with other existing approaches, in particular the critical international society literature, ontological security and psychological approaches. The chapter also introduces the concept of hegemony, which is central to the theoretical frame of the book.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the material aspects of Russia's peripherality. This is done against the historical background, which is required first of all to demonstrate the persistent character of dependency and to trace the genealogy of its specific forms. It also helps to spell out the key argument of the chapter, which concerns Russia's deferred development. On the one hand, presenting the country as 'backward' is a hallmark of Orientalising and self-Orientalising discourses, which, as postcolonial wisdom insists, must be taken critically as manifestations of Eurocentrism. On the other hand, there is no conceivable way to make sense of the Russian case outside of the modern frame of reference. Russia does not represent any 'alternative' modernity: as a nation, it has fully internalised the neo-liberal capitalist model of development and does not possess any type of consciousness other than Eurocentrism. Its unquestionable difference from the rest of Europe is determined by the fact of its being a peripheral country and thus is a result of uneven and combined development. The broader point that I make on the basis of my analysis is that dismissing Eurocentrism as outright 'wrong' can be counterproductive. What the Russian case suggests is a careful deconstruction, which pays due respect to the fact that we do, after all, live in a Eurocentric world.

Chapter 4 turns to the normative aspects of Russia's dependency. Having briefly discussed the evolution of Russia's discursive field in the post-Soviet period, I examine the newly assertive position that the Kremlin has taken since the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third presidential term. To emphasise ideological parallels with the right-wing movements in the West and to differentiate from other conservative currents, I label the contemporary radical traditionalist ideology 'paleoconservatism', after its US analogue. By focusing, in particular, on the Kremlin's recent quest for 'soft power', I demonstrate that the traditional Russia which paleoconservatives strive to recover from beneath the liberal distortions is no more than a mirror image of the West as it is seen through the lens of Russian common sense. As distinct from what scholars normally expect to locate in the postcolony, the Russian peasant, the guardian of anti-historical memories, is nowhere to be found.

Instead, the empty spot in the centre of Russian national identity, as it is constructed by the paleoconservatives, is occupied by a typical Orientalist figure: the imaginary noble savage, uncontaminated by subversive Westernising influences. The more radical is the antagonisation of the West by the paleoconservative discourse, the more fully its normative horizon is being defined by pure negativity, and therefore the only political agenda Putinism is capable of advancing is reactionary, in the purest sense of being a reaction to anything that is being promoted as progress by the West at any given moment.

The theme of subaltern subjectivity and its political representation runs through the book, but it is in the final chapter, Chapter 5, that I give my full attention to this problem, relying, for this purpose, on the Schmittean brand of post-foundational political theory. Like Chapter 4, it also focuses on the recent imperialist turn in Russian politics, this time with an emphasis on the securitisation of the West and the concurrent offensive policies in the post-Soviet space. I argue that this offensive must be viewed primarily as a legitimist move in defence of the principle of non-intervention, and thus as a continuation of previous policies, rather than as an abrupt change. The most important aspect of Putinism, at least from the view of this book, is still its impact on the domestic scene: it is engaged in a consistent disavowal of politics and thus blocks the emergence of a popular subject. Russia's claims to international subjectivity, in turn, are compromised by the reactive (and reactionary) nature of its policies. While post-foundational political theory would stop there, re-introducing the postcolonial perspective enables me to conclude that the only one subject on the horizon of Russian politics is the West itself. This completes my inquiry into the nature of Russian subaltern imperialism, in which the people are silenced and the sovereign re-acts by mimicking the West, while the time and space of Russian modernity is single-handedly defined by the Western Eurocentric subject.

Due to the fact that this book is addressed to diverse audiences and therefore has to move in several directions, it is hardly possible to provide a summary at the end. What my brief conclusion does instead is taking us back to the debate on Russia's relationship with civilisation and highlighting the blind spots in this debate, which my book hopefully brings to sight. For the reader who wants a more systematic overview but does not have time to read the whole monograph, the introductory part of each chapter includes a brief exposition of the whole, while the most important findings are discussed in the concluding sections of Chapters 3–5.

I realise that some of the readers might find certain arguments in the text below as having been taken too far. In particular, this probably concerns my contention that Russia has been fully Europeanised and thus cannot, even potentially, offer any alternative to Eurocentric hegemony. To some extent, this is a matter of definition of European modernity: the concept might be so wide that there is virtually nothing left outside of it, except for mimesis. I believe, however, that this is a problem not of this book but rather of all contemporary thinking in the social sciences, and in particular in postcolonial studies. As I argue in Chapter 1, it often sees the postcolony as delimited by reified social constructs, such as culture, race, geography and religion. It certainly has trouble discussing these boundaries independently of the predefined frames. By claiming that Russia has completely Europeanised and yet remained different, I make a wider point that social boundaries, including the one between the postcolony and the core, are ontologically separate from any pre-existing markers. While I believe my empirical reasoning to be largely true, the main purpose of the book is to stimulate reflection and controversy about the problems which are much more profound than any case-related issue. In short, this book must be read not as an attempt to assert the final truth of one particular interpretation but as an invitation to debate.



# 1

## The Postcolonial and the Imperial in the Space and Time of World Politics

This chapter's formative question concerns the limits of the postcolonial. In order to introduce my project in the context of postcolonial theory, I need to demonstrate that this theory can benefit from looking at Russia as a subaltern empire – a space which is both imperial and postcolonial – while also showing that it has evolved as such in the historical time of European civilisation. To do this implies addressing the question of limits: where and when does the postcolonial space begin? Does the postcolonial begin where the imperial ends, meaning that both are mutually exclusive? Does it begin at the end of colonialism, that is, after decolonisation?

Anyone with a more than superficial exposure to postcolonial writing would not hesitate to dismiss the last two questions as hopelessly naïve. Of course, it is the entire humanity which has found itself affected by the postcolonial condition ever since the beginning of the European colonial expansion. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the postcolonial is co-dimensional, and even co-substantial, with modernity as such: the colonial Other<sup>1</sup> inheres in the European Enlightenment, all modern identities are therefore hybrid, and it is only our choice to see or not to see them this way. Yet, there are texts that construct the world as neatly divided between the empire and the postcolony, and some of them see the postcolony as having emerged 'after' colonialism. Since my argument would make no sense in a world like that, discussing the limits of the postcolonial is my top priority.

In terms of scholarly practice, my argument is that, first of all, Russia must be more systematically studied in the postcolonial context, and secondly, such study must pay enough attention to Russia's subalternity, instead of focusing exclusively on the internal colonisation of Russia's periphery. This book as a whole is devoted to presenting

substantial arguments supporting this assertion. I argue that Russia is almost completely dependent on the West in both economic and normative terms, and it is increasingly trying to justify its foreign policy conduct by accusing the West of neocolonialism while pointing out the injustices inherent in the current international order. At the same time, Moscow continues to engage in imperial pursuits in its 'near abroad', explicitly relying on the Soviet legacy to secure and expand its 'spheres of influence'. Contemporary Russia's identity critically depends on its (post-)imperial self-image as a great power, where greatness is still defined by referring to the Soviet past. Last but not least, the Kremlin's rhetoric regarding the need to democratise the international system by promoting a multipolar world coexists with increasingly repressive domestic policies, which seek to perpetuate the monopoly of the party of power. All of this suggests that describing Russia as a subaltern empire makes sense both as a tool to better understand Russian politics and for laying the ground for international comparisons.

In order to position this argument more clearly in the context of postcolonial studies and to discuss its implications, this chapter opens with several explanatory fragments whose main connection is the title and the subtitle of the book. I start with the term 'subaltern' and then briefly address a few possible objections in applying it to Russia. I then clarify what I mean by saying that Russia finds itself in a Eurocentric world. All of these explanations are no more than outlines whose main purpose is to give a general impression about where my analysis is going. It takes the entire book to fully develop my argument.

Having outlined my system of conceptual coordinates, I move on to provide my own interpretation of the strengths and weaknesses of postcolonial theory. It must be borne in mind that this is a case-oriented account, rather than a full review of a theoretical field. I concentrate on a few questions that are of key importance for my inquiry: the location and limits of postcoloniality and the representation of the subaltern. I argue that the postcolonial cannot be defined by any pre-given criteria: its identification must be situational rather than abstract and relational rather than 'cultural'. The final part of the chapter critically examines the paradigm of internal colonisation in Russian studies. My contention is that the crucial external dimension of this phenomenon is trivialised and hence overlooked by this paradigm. The best way of correcting it is not just by taking postcolonialism seriously, but by supplementing it with such elements of the neo-Marxist conceptual toolkit as hegemony and uneven and combined development. Their significance, however, is more fully explicated in the subsequent chapters.

## Conceptual mapping

The term 'subaltern' has been established in the academic literature primarily due to the efforts of the Subaltern Studies Group, which promoted a research agenda focused on the relations of domination and especially on the experiences and agency of the dominated (Prakash 1994). The most sophisticated among its many existing interpretations, embraced, *inter alia*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, goes back to Antonio Gramsci, who is customarily credited with introducing the term in the context of political theory.<sup>2</sup> In this tradition, the subaltern is defined as disenfranchised, having 'insufficient access to modes of representation' (Chattopadhyay and Sarkar 2005: 359), the one whose agency is limited (and constructed as limited, for example, in Orientalist discourses) by the existing social order – 'a structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed' (Morris 2010: 8). In Gramsci's view, as Marcus Green (2011) has shown, subaltern groups can be completely excluded from the popular in a relationship of domination (in which the people is constructed as if the subaltern did not matter) or have their interests represented in a relationship of hegemony. In any case, however, what characterises the subaltern is the fact that the dominant groups tend to confuse two modes of representation: speaking about the subaltern (i.e. describing their situation, re-presenting it) and speaking for the subaltern (i.e. having them 'voiced over' by intermediaries who do not share their experience and hence silencing them). Being *spoken for* is probably the key criterion that defines subalternity for Spivak, while the representation of the subaltern is one of the main problems she struggles with (see Spivak 1988, 1999, Kapoor 2008: 41–59).

It is obvious that a concept like this cannot be directly applied to countries or states, because the latter, in particular, do have their own voice by definition. As sovereign participants of the international system and various international fora, even the smallest and weakest of states can speak with their own voice. Russia, which has been a very vocal opponent of the West and has made its position known not only verbally but also by using 'hard power', is an obvious case in point.

Yet, I do believe that the concept can and must be used in International Relations (IR) and that Russia is a good example of an identity that has been rendered subaltern in the existing world order. This is true in several ways. Firstly, in economic terms, Russia is dependent on the global capitalist core (this is the main topic of Chapter 3). It is important to emphasise that for Gramsci, economic subordination was an

important element defining the position of the 'subaltern classes' (Green 2011). Moreover, as Eiman Zein-Elabdin (2004: 23) points out, the notion of subalternity 'better captures the organic relationship between economic and cultural subordination (than the term dependency, for instance)'.

Secondly, as Chapter 4 makes clear, the language Russia speaks while challenging Western hegemony is the same Eurocentric language which cements the hegemonic order. Russia's discursive space has been fully Europeanised during several centuries of catch-up modernisation, and its social structure has evolved in such a way that there are no groups within the country capable of developing an alternative articulation of Russian identity. The desperate attempts to promote conservative values and to strengthen the 'spiritual bonds' holding the nation together are all grounded in European romantic philosophy. They are defended by presenting Russia as the 'true Europe' (in contrast to the morally decadent West) and by alluding to the 'civilised countries' as a model which has unquestionable normative authority.

Russia has successfully colonised itself on behalf of Europe but has been unable to assimilate. There remains a powerful tension between, as Lene Hansen (2006) would say, linking and differentiation in its European identity, with a mirror structure functioning on the other side of the Schengen curtain. This tension evidently originates in the dialectic of the subaltern and the imperial and appears to be the single most important driving force of Russian politics during the last couple of centuries. All of this is strikingly homologous with the condition of the subaltern, which is socially constructed as different and subordinate, and at the same time rendered speechless by the existing hegemonic order.

Thirdly and finally, there is the question of what is meant by Russia in this context. Throughout this book, I use it as a name for an identity and the corresponding political community, which is produced by forces of identification and antagonism, socio-economic practices and, of course, power – including, but not limited to, the power of the Russian state. I never refer to Russia when I only mean the state or the regime, using instead a range of easily decipherable synonyms (the Kremlin, the Russian state, etc.). However, it would be extremely naïve to reify the distinction between the state and the people: the former is not a fully autonomous unit; it 'thinks' and 'acts' through discourses that are generated and reproduced by the latter.

At the same time, 'Russia' is not an autonomous unit either: its very existence is conditioned by the social structure at all levels, from the

global to the local. Russia exists as a state because it is part of the 'Westphalian world', organised around the idea of national sovereignty. It also exists because the Russians as a people share a certain common sense and engage in the 'daily plebiscite' (to use Ernest Renan's famous formula) in their routine transactions. Analytically, we can separate different levels of social reality, as well as different subjectivities involved in any situation. From this point of view, the Russian state can also be conceived of as an agent of the global capitalist core, which colonises its 'own' periphery (which, in this case, includes the entire country – at least, as the Russians say, outside of the Garden Ring, or downtown Moscow). In this image, the subaltern position is occupied by the Russian people, which is continuously de-subjectified and silenced by the empire. Since roughly the 1830s, a part of the intelligentsia has been busy trying to give voice to the natives whom they see around themselves. It produces all sorts of romanticist doctrines, from Slavophilism to Vladimir Putin's latest version of paleoconservatism, but inevitably ends up speaking for the people. The emergence of the popular subject is blocked by Eurocentric hegemony, which fears the Russian people as barbarian and rebellious.

It appears that there is a lot of value added in looking at modern Russia through the conceptual lens of subalternity. However, it is important to always keep in mind the presence of the imperial, which seems to be a constant attribute of the Russian subaltern. This also applies to the subalternity of the Russian people – as illustrated, *inter alia*, by the overwhelming support for the annexation of Crimea by Russian public opinion. One could try to describe this in terms of the 'good' people having been brainwashed by the 'bad' regime, but this, again, would be a reification. Instead of searching, in vain, for a pure and noble native, uncontaminated by the imperial element of Russia's identity, it is much more productive to see the Russian people as a hybridised postcolonial subject, oppressed and longing to invert the oppressive relationship, to kill the Master and take his place.

The term 'subaltern empire' has been used by some scholars to describe Russia's ambiguous position between the West and its own Orientalised periphery (e.g. Tlostanova 2008). Russia's position in the international system is certainly not unique: the same expression is widely (and loosely) applied by historians also to Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman empire, China and Japan (see Mignolo 2005). Yet, in today's world, this phenomenon manifests itself much more clearly in the Russian case. On the one hand, since its emergence as a sovereign polity in the fifteenth century, Russia has never been colonised by anyone but

itself; more than that, it created a vast and powerful empire. This clearly differentiates Russia from most, if not all, other nations whose identity includes a visible subaltern element. On the other hand, Russia's self-colonisation revealed a continuous pattern of economic and normative dependence on the West: even the search for an indigenous identity that was supposed to ensure an independent standing was framed in Orientalist terms borrowed from the Western tradition (Etkind 2011, see also Chapters 3–5 below). As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, this dependence is even more visible today, and as before, it coexists with imperial resentment.

Turkey is perhaps the only country whose position in the current international system in the most important respects is similar to Russia's, and this similarity has recently become the focus of a number of comparative studies (Neumann 1999, Lieven 2000, Hill and Taspinar 2006, Sakwa 2010, Zarakol 2011). However, Russia's discourse presents a much more explicit challenge to the political values promoted by the West, while Turkey, even with its new assertiveness in the international arena, continues to uphold the universalist interpretation of liberal democracy (Morozov and Rumelili 2012, Rumelili 2013).<sup>3</sup> Thus, while subaltern imperialism is indeed a relatively frequent phenomenon in world politics, the Russian case can be expected to display its most characteristic features and therefore deserves particular attention.

Describing Russia as a subaltern empire is certainly controversial and needs to be justified on a number of grounds. First of all, this categorisation must not be read as an apology. This book is certainly not free from a normative agenda, but the latter by no means includes the idea that one always has to solidarise with the subaltern. I fully agree with Paul James's (1997: 73) characterisation of 'subjection within global capitalism' as 'a thoroughly double-sided and self-active process', also in the sense that Third World policymakers are complicit in oppressive practices. In my view, the Russian case helps to highlight the fact that those speaking in the name of the subaltern are often fully incorporated in the global structure of domination as its local repressive agents. The question of the representation and normative standing of the subaltern is actually one of the core themes of this book.

Secondly, classifying Russia as a subaltern empire only makes sense if one abandons the view, typical for some 'decolonial' literature, of the world as neatly divided between (former) empires and colonised nations. Kevin Platt (2012a) believes that the persistence of this view is due to intellectual and political inertia of, on the one hand, the study of overseas empires and, on the other hand, of decolonisation,

in which normally the border between the colonisers and the colonised was rather unambiguously defined. As pointed out above, Russia can be considered as both a colonial power and a colonised country, especially if one appreciates the extent to which colonial practices have been in operation everywhere across the geographical expanse of the country, including in the ethnic Russian heartland (Etkind 2011, Etkind et al. 2012). Since its early foundational texts, such as Franz Fanon's (1968) *Black Skin, White Masks*, postcolonialism has been approaching the colonial relationship as deeply and irreversibly affecting both sides and leaving durable trace everywhere, in the core as well as in the periphery. As Iain Chambers (1996: 209) writes, the former designation of the postcolony as the 'Third World' 'was intended to signal both spatial and temporal distance – "out there" and "back there" – the postcolonial perspective insists, in both spatial and temporal terms, that the "other" world is "in here"'. Summarising the writings of Homi Bhabha and Spivak, Ilan Kapoor (2008: 8) concludes: 'According to both theorists, colonial discourse had forever marked colonized and ex-colonized societies (and for that matter colonial and ex-colonial powers), so that it is impossible to recuperate any identity uncontaminated by it.' I also follow Bhabha, along with Achilles Mbembe, in emphasising the hybridity of identities locked in any hegemonic relationship and thus their being co-constitutive in relation to each other.

My writing in the subsequent chapters assumes that we have enough knowledge about the imperial aspects of Russia's domestic order, both historical and current. The vast literature on empire studies has also achieved a great deal in terms of comparing the Russian case with other empires, both continental and overseas, core and peripheral. Without attempting even a short overview, I would just refer to the writings of Dominic Lieven (2000, 2004), which build on the achievements of the entire field to provide an excellent comparative analysis of Russia's imperial experience. What I concentrate on in my own analysis are, firstly, the subaltern aspects of Russia's condition and, secondly, the dialectic of the subaltern and the imperial, especially in the international arena.

In a certain sense, subaltern imperialism is another facet of the phenomenon that in the world-systems literature has been described as semi-peripherality. I do, to some extent, rely on a world-systems analytical framework, especially when it comes to the analysis of the material aspects of Russia's dependent position. Accordingly, I use the terms 'core' and 'periphery', but not necessarily with the same rigour as world-systems theorists would perhaps prefer to. I am mostly interested in

relative peripherality, rather than in the exact location of a particular state or region on the core–periphery spectrum. Thus, I consider Russia as a periphery in relation to the West (or Western Europe, the European Union (EU)), while at the same time the Russian state occupies a position closer to the core in relation to Russia’s own colonised periphery. Mostly for this reason, I do not systematically label Russia as semi-peripheral, using this classification only when it makes sense in the relative terms.

At a more general level, categorising Russia as a subaltern empire, rather than just as semi-periphery, opens up a much wider horizon of meaning. It necessarily includes paying serious attention to discursive and normative structures of hegemony and not just to the place of individual states or regions in the international division of labour (cf. Wallerstein 1974: 349). Other aspects of how world-systems theory can be useful in studying Russia’s condition are discussed in Chapter 2, where I compare various approaches in Russian studies.

The statement that Russia finds itself in a Eurocentric world, contained in the subtitle of this book, must be read in a deconstructive manner. To an extent, it is an empirical statement about ‘the world out there’: there is by now a vast literature exposing the Eurocentrism behind the very foundational principles of the international system (for influential examples, see Anghie 2004, Darby 2004, Inayatullah and Blaney 2004, Hobson 2012). At the same time, I fully solidarise with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000) scepticism about the feasibility of ‘provincialising Europe’ from within the academe. Being a scholar implies sharing certain rules of academic communication; moreover, it is these rules which make scholars (as communicative agents) in the first place (cf. Onuf 1998). These constitutive rules originate in the same Eurocentric paradigm of the Enlightenment which is criticised by the postcolonial tradition and people sympathising with its normative agenda. What we as scholars can attempt is deconstruction from within rather than revolution from outside. I am trying to suggest, at the end of this volume, that the cognitive subject of modern science must leave the task of changing the Eurocentric world to the subaltern political subject – in the hope that this subject is going to emerge at some stage.

Hence, the characterisation of Russia’s world as Eurocentric is first and foremost a reflexive statement: it describes the world as it is experienced by the Russians themselves. One of the key points I make is that Russia has fully internalised the Eurocentric paradigm. This refers to both material and ideational structures, in as much as those can be differentiated. For the Russians, Europe is the centre of the world, and their identities and practices are situated within the European normative order and the



capitalist world economy. What they perceive as exclusion from Europe is probably better described in terms of inequality (e.g. as 'hierarchical inclusion', see Prozorov 2009c), which is manifest at all levels of production and exchange – both material and symbolic. Again, the notion of hybrid subalternity, contaminated by imperialism, captures the full meaning of this predicament.

## Demarcating the postcolonial

I understand postcolonialism as a critical approach, seeking to reveal the relations of power and discrimination behind the façade of formal equality that is taken for granted in liberal capitalist society. It originates in the Marxian critique of capitalism, but has incorporated insights from a range of scholarly fields as diverse as structural linguistics, psychoanalysis and, of course, cultural anthropology. Most decisively, it was shaped by an uneasy accommodation between neo-Marxist and poststructuralist critiques (Gandhi 1998, McEwan 2009: 27, Sajed 2012, Matin 2013b).

Given its internal diversity, postcolonialism can hardly be understood as a single theory (Young 2003, McEwan 2009: 3–26). In this book, I use the term 'postcolonial theory' as referring to a certain mode of theorising; the word 'theory' here is synonymous with 'perspective' or 'approach'. What differentiates this type of theoretical reflection from other critical approaches is its insistence on a situated perspective: in Charlotte Epstein's words, it strives

to mobilize the particular and the local, in their infinite richness, as sites for deploying a form of theorizing that, by way of this grounding, seeks to avert the pitfalls of a universalization that was a key historical driver of colonization in the first place.

(2014: 298)

While there is no consensus among postcolonial scholars about how to handle the universal (for an argument affirming postcolonial universality, see Matin 2013b), what remains unchanged is the insistence on the need to foreground concrete experiences. For Epstein, situatedness of research does not preclude generalisation, with a crucial precondition that one be aware of the limits of one's perspective (see also Haraway 1988). With this in mind, one could suggest that the problem of liberal universalism is not universalisation as such, but the lack of reflection about the particularity of Western historical experience, which serves as

the foundation of universality. Hence, Epstein (2014: 300) concludes: 'The postcolonial perspective, then, is a necessarily partial perspective that foregrounds grounded, embodied experiences, steeped in colonial histories, as the basis for engaging epistemologically.'

The insistence on grounding refers to the postcolony as a particular locality. It is common in postcolonial writing to assume that this locality can be defined in pre-given terms. Most often the localisation is geographical: the postcolony is located either in the former Western colonies or, for more broadly minded scholars, outside the West (which permits the inclusion of countries that were never *de jure* colonised). Another criterion is race: it can be combined with the previous one and is usually applied with a reference to Fanon.

The validity of these criteria in the majority of concrete situations that are of interest to postcolonial studies is beyond doubt. However, using them to define the postcolony as a more general condition highlights a potentially troubling dilemma. It is faced by the entire project of postcolonial studies, but in particular by the postcolonial and decolonial approaches in International Relations. Here, the rationale of writing is often defined as 'theorizing from indigenous experience' (Taylor 2012: 389). Indigeneity, however, is nearly always treated as a given presence whose difference from its variously defined opposite is self-evident. The area of exploration is thus delineated by the tradition rather than reflection – either geographically (Chan et al. 2001, Ling 2002, Acharya and Buzan 2011) or by such markers as race, slavery and religious difference (Gruffydd Jones 2006, 2013, Shani 2008, Krishna 2009). As Lucy Taylor (2012: 390) revealingly puts it, 'coloniality scholars are not only writing "as if people mattered", but as if particular, colonized people mattered'.

Even those authors who prefer to tread much more carefully on the shaky postcolonial terrain often end up reproducing problematic assumptions about colonial difference. In her insightful analysis of postcolonial agency, Vivienne Jabri struggles with the defusing potential inherent in Bhabha's concept of hybridity: 'In seeking to shift postcolonial theory beyond the oppositional framework of coloniser/colonised, Bhabha might be said to lose sight of the defining conflict that generated resistance against colonial power' (Jabri 2014: 387). As a more radical alternative, Jabri offers Fanon's 'materiality, not simply Marxist, but profoundly corporeal': it is in this material, bodily sense that 'the very presence of the postcolonial subject is always already subversive' (2014: 384–85). However, this corporeal presence can be identified only through race, and thus it is only the 'racialised hierarchies' (2014: 385, 388) that are questioned through this move.

Introducing 'cultural difference as *enunciative* category' (2005: 85),<sup>4</sup> Bhabha is certainly aware of the danger of essentialism. He emphasises the importance of seeing 'the cultural not as the *source* of conflict – *different* cultures – but as the *effect* of discriminatory practices – the production of cultural *differentiation* as signs of authority' (2005: 163). However, the cultural difference remains a key resource that provides a starting point for his theory of postcolonial agency.

These observations raise two crucial, and related, questions: the first question is about the definition of the postcolonial (or the native, the indigenous) as such and its differentiation from its imperial, Western, Eurocentric and presumably oppressive Other. Can we find ground for a comparative analysis of similar historical experiences even if some of them belong to the 'classical' colonial spaces while others seemingly occur in the core of an imperial space? Can this be done without essentialising culture and race? The other question concerns the normative standing of the subaltern subject: does the very inequality inherent in a colonial relationship endow the peripheral voices with moral authority? Is any critique of Eurocentrism of normative value just by virtue of a peripheral subject position of the speaker? Both these questions are highlighted by looking at Russia's experience with international society including both the imperial and the subaltern aspects of it.

More specifically, in the context of Jabri's analysis and multiple parallel lines of thought, it is imperative to ask whether blackness as such is a marker of postcolonial identity. While this might be true in abstract terms, in some concrete situations this might not be the case: in any particular situation, a colonial empire can be represented by people of any colour, especially in today's globalised world. The opposite is also true: Russian imperial space has included subaltern groups whose racial difference from the colonisers ranged from very conspicuous to zero. Moreover, as Alexander Etkind (2011) has brilliantly argued, the paradoxical nature of Russian internal colonisation consisted in the fact that the core group of the colonised, the Russian peasants, was of the same race, language and religion as the colonisers. The cultural difference was still there (otherwise one could hardly classify this situation as colonial) and was immediately visible, but it was marked in much less conventional ways. Another trivial, but nonetheless significant, observation to add here concerns the connection, presumed in Jabri's emphasis on materiality, between individual bodies and subalternity. In fact, this connection is not as absolute as she seems to imply: an ethnic Russian peasant or worker, who would qualify as a subaltern beyond any doubt by simply looking at their social status and material situation, could still represent the empire in a colonial war in the North Caucasus or as a

settler in, say, Estonia or Latvia once under Soviet rule. As it turns out, the mere bodily presence of an oppressed individual in a certain territory can have a meaning opposite to what Jabri proposes to see in the materiality of the subaltern.

The above examples demonstrate that paying more attention to post-Soviet memories and experiences could help postcolonial studies to better differentiate between the essential and the contingent in the definition of the colonial situation. In this geographical area, the interplay between the centre and the periphery produces differences with a much more immediate *political*, as opposed to cultural, significance. As David Chioni Moore (2001) suggested over a decade ago, far from being a deviant case, the imperial past and the post-imperial present of Central and Eastern Europe/Northern Eurasia can provide an independent theoretical standpoint enriching both postcommunist and postcolonial studies. As I move through my analysis of the Russian case, I show that the cultural dimension of the postcolonial boundary is subordinate to the political one. In cultural and identity terms, Russia has assimilated into the Eurocentric order; as an international actor, it is completely dependent on the West in normative terms. However, its identity is still ambiguous: it is rooted in Russia's colonial encounters both as an empire (*vis-à-vis* its periphery) and as a subaltern (*vis-à-vis* the global core). The markers that designate the postcolonial boundaries are contingent and, especially in the case of Russia–West relations, alternate depending on the political circumstances. Obviously, they are not completely accidental or arbitrary, being chosen from a certain repertoire obtained in the deeper layers of the discursive structures sedimented over the centuries.<sup>5</sup> Yet, none of them, taken in isolation, is essential for keeping the boundary in place. Rather, it is sustained by the logic of uneven and combined development, which is inherent in the Eurocentric global order as such. Both material and normative dependence on the West is therefore an essential element of Russia's subaltern position.

The difficulty with identifying the subaltern abstractly, outside of a specific situation, by itself suggests the need to question the identity of any voice denouncing colonial oppression. A subject position that can be formally identified as subaltern does not automatically yield a subaltern subject. Apart from the identification issue, there is a whole range of other problems that cannot be solved outside of the specific context. An oppressed individual can internalise the hegemonic discourse or can revolt against certain norms imposed by the global hegemon, because they undermine this individual's privileged position in the local structures of inequality. Many ethnic Russians oppose internationally promoted minority rights under the pretext of these norms

being imposed by the West, while the real motivation behind this resistance is prejudice against non-Russian labour migrants, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and other minorities.

These observations are certainly relevant also in the context of the disciplinary reflexion in IR. There is little doubt that indigenous experiences from all over the world can contribute to the development of IR 'by denaturalizing hegemonic orders and ideas' (Beier 2005: 174). Yet, such concepts as 'ethical incommensurability', 'heterology' (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 7–8, 15–16), 'worldism', 'trans-subjectivity' (Agathangelou and Ling 2009) or 'plurotopic hermeneutics' (Tlostanova 2012: 131) must not be uncritically promoted as possible building blocks for a future less Eurocentric IR. Attempts to promote a 'post-Westphalian' vision 'from the non-West' often assume radical difference where in fact Bhabha's formula, 'almost the same but not quite', could be much more appropriate (Bilgin 2008). While paying lip service to hybridity, 'worldism' smuggles in in the opposite agenda: 'it examines that which arises between Multiple Worlds to bridge, sometimes transform, the gaps between them' (Ling 2014: 23). Bhabha's interstices, the originary sites of hybrid identities, are demoted to 'gaps' – something redundant that needs to be eliminated by 'bridging' between essentially different worlds. The critique of inequality, just as fundamental to postcolonial studies, is similarly sterilised by ideas like 'worldist relationality' (Ling 2014: 87). The fundamental unevenness of global development is reduced to the 'cultural pathology' of 'hypermasculinity' and 'hyperfemininity', which sustain 'the neoliberal imperium'. The latter is portrayed as absolute evil, striving 'to deny, dismiss, or erase other worlds' (Agathangelou and Ling 2009: 2–3).

In the final analysis, this opens the backdoor to moral relativism, which celebrates difference regardless of its political effects. Keeping it away, as S. Charusheela (2004: 55) insists,

entails not only a critique of the 'West', but also critique of and within the 'non-West'. Thus, even as cultural relativism begins to emerge, postcolonial scholarship resists and rejects it, naming its collusion with nativist nationalist fictions of glorious cultural identities that legitimate subordination, domination and pillage in the name of the 'nation' by elite groups in the non-West.

This point is very boldly highlighted by the Russian case: today's Russia is certainly one of those 'subaltern spaces where the fruits of modernity are both demanded and resisted', but one can hardly say

that this resistance precipitates the emergence of 'creative, alternative, cosmopolitan projects' (Tickner and Blaney 2012: 7). While keeping a critical distance from the neo-liberal common sense that dominates conventional IR, it is crucial to do the same in relation to the voices that claim to speak from the subaltern position. While the former often conceals imperialist injustice under the guise of formal legal equality, the latter can cunningly present local oppressive structures as incarnations of the 'indigenous knowledge'. There is little difference in this respect between Russian laws criminalising 'propaganda of homosexuality' or requiring NGOs to register as 'foreign agents' and the persecution of women's rights activists in Pakistan or labour leaders in South Africa.

All of the above illustrates the value of consistency in foregrounding situated experience. This point is also proven by the success of postcolonial theory in demonstrating the impact of colonialism on the imperial centre. This phenomenon was described by Hannah Arendt (1973) in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as 'the boomerang effect', and since the book's publication in 1951 has been taken on board by scores of authors and in very diverse ways.<sup>6</sup> Its primary significance consists in realisation that the colonial relationship is ambiguous and mutually constitutive. In particular, European nation building – both at the centre and in the periphery – has been intimately linked with empire building, to the extent that the two are now conceptualised as a single process. Referring to Uday Singh Mehta, Epstein (2014: 296) argues that 'elision and active erasure' of the 'strange and unfamiliar' in the colonial encounters were necessary preconditions 'to being able to uphold and spread the liberal ideal of the rational individual as a universalizable model, and the necessary founding stone of modern democratic rule *anywhere*'. David Cannadine (2001) has shown that the cultural impact of British colonialism has been significant not just in the colonies but also in the metropole. In Paul Gilroy's works (e.g. 1987, 2004), contemporary British identity emerges as essentially multicultural, haunted by racist melancholia but nevertheless unthinkable without the 'convivial culture' of everyday interaction between different races.

Such reading of postcoloniality, contrary to earlier (mis)interpretations (see for example, McClintock 1992, Shohat 1992), suggests neither a particular place (the former colonies) nor a particular time (after decolonization). In the words of Sanjay Seth (2013a: 1), '[t]he "post" in postcolonial theory does not signify the period or era "after" colonialism came to an end, but rather signifies the entire historical period after the beginnings of colonialism'. However, it can probably be expanded even further, in a way that makes chronological landmarks almost irrelevant.

Rather, postcolonialism is there to address a certain relationship (culturally conditioned and structurally embedded inequality) and to offer a specific perspective where straightforward critique of colonialism gives way to the analysis of how both sides are implicated in the constitution of inequality. The prefix 'post', in the same way as in 'poststructuralism', 'postmodernity' or 'postdependency', indicates exactly this new point of view, rather than an abrupt end of an era. Leela Gandhi (1998) and Cheryl McEwan (2009: 18), among other authors, emphasise the significance of dropping the hyphen in these terms as a sign that no chronological separation is implied. In Bhabha's view, the prefix suggests 'the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences' (Bhabha 2005: 2; see also Kujundzic 2000: 893). The normative agenda of classical anti-colonialism does not go away as a result (McEwan 2009: 25–26), but is formulated in a much more sophisticated way.

### **Hybrid subjectivities**

This brings us to a broader argument, which to a large extent structures the field of postcolonial studies: the colonised subject is often able to mimic the discourse of the coloniser, thus subverting it and making colonial domination a profoundly ambiguous phenomenon. Contemporary interpretations of postcolonial agency describe it not as directly confronting colonialism, but rather as re-appropriating and restructuring the whole discursive space in which domination is possible. Consequently, a typical colonial relationship is one of hybridity. Tracing this concept back to Derrida, Bhabha emphasises that instead of a clear-cut exclusion or opposition, the colonial discourse produces 'a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles' (2005: 159). The colonial encounter becomes a point of origin for the identities of both the coloniser and the colonised, locking them in a relationship in which every attribute of authority can be estranged and appropriated by the colonial double: 'Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition' (2005: 162). Within this space of ambivalence, the hybridised native has learned a political skill of resistance through subversion. Having (seemingly) adopted the knowledge of the Master, the native is not only complicit in its reproduction but also simultaneously

misappropriating and perverting its meaning, thereby circumventing, challenging and refusing colonial authority.

Providing an example of how hybridity works in a subversive way, Bhabha (2005: 145–74) refers to an early nineteenth-century description of an encounter between Anund Messeh, one of the earliest Indian catechists, and a group of Hindu natives. Messeh observes the natives one day reading and discussing the Gospel in a grove of trees. While Messeh asserts that the Bible was provided to the natives by the Europeans and thus teaches ‘the religion of the European Sahibs’, his interlocutors reject the idea, arguing that the word of God cannot emanate from those who ‘eat flesh’. By maintaining that the Book was given to them directly by God, Bhabha writes, the Hindu natives ‘resist the miraculous equivalence of God and the English’ (2005: 168). They accept – at least on the surface – the universality of Christian values but refuse to acknowledge their particularistic origin in the European culture. This, in turn, undermines the religious sanction of European dominance, because the fact that the word of God had been given directly to the natives implies their right to interpret it in accordance with their own cultural predispositions – such as, for example, vegetarianism.

It is easy to see parallels between the hybrid position of the ‘standard’ subaltern subject and the criticism of the West that is often voiced by the leaders of semi-peripheral countries like China, Venezuela and, of course, Russia. While opposing the West, Russia nevertheless frames its own demands in the Western language of democracy. It does acknowledge the universal significance of liberal democratic values but attempts to detach those from their particularistic Western roots and to endow them with a somewhat different meaning – for instance, putting much more emphasis on the principle of sovereignty (Morozov 2008, Sakwa 2012). In doing that, it does not challenge the Western-dominated world order in any radical way – rather, it claims a legitimate voice in the debate about how this world order must evolve.

IR scholars sensitive to this problematique, especially those whose work does not directly deal with the issues of development and colonial legacy, sometimes opt for the concept of liminality as describing approximately the same range of phenomena (Norton 1988, Higgott and Nossal 1997, Rumelili 2003, 2012, Mälksoo 2009, 2012). As a justification for this choice, Bahar Rumelili refers to the fact that Victor Turner, the founder of liminality theory, embedded this approach ‘within a general theory of social structure, while post-colonial approaches have studied hybridity as a particular characteristic of colonial discourses’ (Rumelili



2012: 501). There is, however, no inherent reason why the empirical scope of application for postcolonial hybridity cannot be expanded.<sup>7</sup>

A more serious problem consists in the fact that liminality theory is yet to find a way of dealing with the situations where a liminal in one context (Russia vis-à-vis the West) occupies a dominant position in another, but related, context (Russia's 'internal' periphery). While the same can be said about postcolonial studies (which is one of the reasons why this book has been written), I tend to believe that the concept of hybridity provides a much more solid foundation for dealing with such mutually conditioned hierarchies than liminality theory.

The universality of the hybrid condition in the modern (read postcolonial) world by no means implies that power and inequality are evenly spread through the international system. One of the ways to localise those is by using labels such as 'the West'. While I agree with Neil Lazarus (2012: 122) that 'there is a tendency to fetishize "the west" as the super-agent of domination in the modern world', I still find it necessary to use this term – widely, but with enough reflection. As might be already clear from the above, this signifier names the hegemonic subject of contemporary world politics, and it is this hegemonic position that defines the meaning of the term (Morozov 2010b). The possibility of naming is due to the fact that any hegemony includes an irreducible cultural component. As Chakrabarty points out,

the so-called universal ideas that European thinkers produced in the period from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment... could never be completely universal as pure concepts... For the very language and the circumstances of their formulation must have imported into them intimations of pre-existing histories that were singular and unique, histories that belonged to the multiple parts of Europe. Irreducible elements of these parochial histories must have lingered into concepts that otherwise seemed to be meant for all.

(2000: xiii)

In other words, there are residual elements of the identity of the 'historical West' inherent in any understanding of universal values (cf. Bonnett 2004, Hall and Jackson 2007, Browning and Lehti 2010).

As any other, Western hegemony is historically contingent. The West emerged as the subject of global history because it imposed itself on non-Western communities, whose cultural and civilisational difference was established in the act of colonial othering. This being acknowledged, it is also clear that culture, narrowly understood, plays a very

modest role in the never-ending distancing between the West and the non-West. Today's West is a political community, which comfortably accommodates not just Australia and New Zealand but also Japan and South Korea. It continues to exist as a historical subject mainly because there are communities all over the world whose identities are explicitly (and sometimes even violently) defined as non-Western: in the words of Charusheela (2004: 54), 'disputing, negotiating, and maintaining this divide [between the West and the non-West] is a central aspect of both Western and non-Western cultural self-construction'. Yet, there is nothing beyond these profoundly political dynamics of identification and differentiation that establishes the boundary between the West and the non-West: no inherent 'Westernness' or its opposite. The West is extremely diverse within itself, and even the Western intellectual tradition is ambivalent in its dealing with the non-West. In the disciplinary canon, 'the knowledge of cultural difference must be made to foreclose the Other', but, at the same time, a crucial distinction is 'to be made between the institutional history of critical theory and its conceptual potential for change and innovation' (Bhabha 2005: 46). Historical subjectivity of the West derives from colonialism and anti-colonial struggles, but critical reflexivity of Western modernity is also capable of rising above its particularity, at least in terms of realising the limitations that it imposes on our thinking and action.

Such an interpretation of the historical subjectivity of the West implies that we are dealing with a split subject, which is always located here and elsewhere, inside and outside of 'the West proper'. It is a subject that is essentially postcolonial – in the sense of being shaped by colonialism and anti-colonialism, but also reflexively aware of its imperial roots. As Bhabha contends, this split also has a temporal dimension; the modern subject exists both in the past and in present:

the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the People as contemporaneity.

(2005: 208)

This, however, applies not just to the West but also to its colonial double: starting already with Fanon, the postcolonial tradition assiduously strives to overcome Hegelian dialectics by refusing to see the Slave as

the antagonist of the Master and instead suggesting the postcolonial as 'another time, another space' (Bhabha 2005: 341).

As I see it, it is this move beyond dialectics that is also central to two other crucial pieces of postcolonial writing that inspire me in my pursuit: *Can the Subaltern Speak?* by Spivak and *Provincializing Europe* by Chakrabarty. From a certain viewpoint, they move in opposite directions: Chakrabarty sets out to interrogate monological Eurocentrism inherent in the idea of history, while Spivak questions our ability to access the experience of the oppressed. In terms of binary oppositions, Spivak's argument undermines Chakrabarty's attempt to provincialise Europe by tapping into subaltern experience, irreducible to the linear idea of history that drives capitalist modernity. If this experience evades verbalisation, it is unclear how it could have an impact on our historical consciousness. However, since neither scholar sees the world as shaped by binary oppositions, in the end, their critique could be seen as mutually reinforcing.<sup>8</sup>

In an attempt to make sense of 'the Russian enigma', it is easy to deploy Chakrabarty's anti-historicism as a blunt weapon against the transitological paradigm. This argument, made by scholars and politicians alike, dismisses attempts to 'Westernise', 'democratise' and 'civilise' Russia as based on the Eurocentric assumption that Russia's development is driven by the same general laws of history that produced the liberal capitalist society in the West. Russia's historical experience is different, and therefore it will never fully assimilate.

There is a lot of truth in this line of reasoning, and yet I refrain from following it in my own critique of Eurocentrism as applied to Russia. First of all, the representation of Russia as unambiguously different probably has to be classified as a historicist fallacy, in the same way as the assumption of the search for 'non Western perspectives' in IR reifies the boundary between the West and the non-West. Historicism, Chakrabarty (2000: 23) writes, 'takes its object of investigation to be internally unified, and sees it as something developing over time'. In as much as one looks at Russia as an entity characterised by certain continuity (in terms of territory, demography, law, identity, memory, etc.) and possessing international subjectivity, there is no way around this assumption. However, giving heed to Chakrabarty's critique of historicism implies perceiving Russia not as a bounded entity, but as a complex social phenomenon, whose identity and boundaries are constantly contested from both inside and outside. It must be viewed as an empire in relation to its own population (which, in its turn, has always been very far from homogenous and equal) and as a subaltern in the context of the global capitalist system.

Continuity must also be problematised, at least in as much as we are dealing with the early stages of Russian history. Before Russia became part of European modernity (as a semi-periphery), it contained within its geographical and political space potentialities for alternative development. There was no teleological, necessary connection between the Kievan Rus, or even early Muscovy, and modern empire. However, the range of alternatives narrowed down dramatically as Russia colonised itself on behalf of the European civilisation. Whether the Bolshevik revolution could have, with more luck, subtracted Russia from capitalist development is an open question, but it certainly failed to do so in fact. Apart from the possibility of another unpredictable revolutionary breakthrough, any discussion of alternatives as applied to Russia must treat it as an integral part of the global capitalist civilisation.

This is my second, and rather paradoxical, lesson from Chakrabarty. An honest critique of Eurocentrism must not take any difference for an indication of the presence of 'antihistorical devices of memory' that Chakrabarty (2000: 40 and elsewhere) associates with the figure of the peasant. Chakrabarty re-interprets Bhabha's notion of the colonial encounter in neo-Marxist terms, its main protagonists being capital and the universe of pre-modern memories, which is 'larger than the sum of those elements in which are worked out the logical presuppositions of capital' (2000: 64). These encounters happen 'everywhere – even in the West' (2000: 69), but capital exerts powerful homogenising pressure, assimilating its antecedents. While Chakrabarty is interested in the anti-historical memories that have successfully resisted assimilation, my case drives me in the opposite direction. I argue that Russia's difference does not stem from a set of pre-modern, pre-capitalist memories. Rather, it is a difference produced by the logic of uneven and combined development that is *internal* to capitalist modernity. In Russia's past, there were undoubtedly alternative modes of relating to the world, but we no longer have access to them. Russia's present alternatives are the same as those of Europe or the West, but adjusted to its semi-peripheral status. Other, more conventional cases of postcolonial development might offer a broader range of possibilities,<sup>9</sup> but I conclude that looking at Russia for inspiration in this context is futile and even counter-productive.

The latter point is yet another warning against direct universalisation of any particularist position just because it claims to represent 'the colonised'. It is greatly reinforced by Spivak's questioning of the subaltern's speaking capacity. What is at stake here is the representation of the subaltern: while the oppressed masses by definition cannot make their voices directly heard, it is the intellectuals who take upon

themselves the mission to speak in the name of the exploited. The subaltern subject is often constructed in this process as sovereign and self-transparent: 'the oppressed, if given the chance . . . and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics . . . *can speak and know their conditions*' (Spivak 1999: 269). According to Spivak (1999: 270, 283), this ignores the fact that 'the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous', and thus silences the voices of 'the other subject', in particular of subaltern women. In a certain sense, this is a matter of definition: thus, according to Morris (2010: 8), '[t]o the extent that anyone escapes the muting of subalternity, she ceases being a subaltern'. Yet there is also a deeper methodological and even philosophical problem that Spivak struggles with: 'How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?' (1999: 272–73).

This question is also central to my study, since, as I demonstrate further on, the Kremlin's complaints about the discrimination Russia allegedly faces in the international arena are based on a vulgarising imitation of the universal democratic norm. While Moscow's subaltern empire claims to represent the Russian people, the effect of these tricks is silencing and oppressing – not just in terms of suppressing dissent, but also by economic disenfranchisement and brainwashing in the media. The usurpation of the popular voice is so complete that the problem of representation, key to subaltern studies, is not even formulated in relation to Russia's standing in world affairs.

The success of this reactionary discourse testifies to 'the superb ability of established essentialist discourses to appropriate the legacies and language of the critical Western trends' (Waldstein 2010: 103). It constructs a space *almost* like postcolonial one, 'as a separation from origins and essences' (Bhabha 2005: 171), and it certainly interrogates and dislocates the hegemonic discourse by 'the insertion or intervention of something that takes on a new meaning'. Regardless of its instrumental origin, it can be described as 'the sign [that] ceases the synchronous flow of the symbol [and] seizes the power to elaborate . . . new and hybrid agencies and articulations' (2005: 274–75). The problem, however, is that the origins and essences that are mimicked and mocked in this discourse include the emancipatory values on which the postcolonial project is based. Postcolonial intuition therefore would not hesitate to dismiss the Kremlin's statements as cynically abusing the ethics of hybridity. Yet, do we really have any serious defence against such skilful abuse – a counterargument that goes beyond intuition? In other words, can postcolonial theory provide us with a tool to differentiate, in

normative terms, between the natives' demand for an Indianised Gospel and Putin's invocation of anti-colonial critique in defence of his government's poor democratic record? Or, can the ethics of hybridity be saved only by going back to the original postcolonial situation – that is, by artificially limiting the scope of postcolonial studies to the cases where clear and unambiguous cultural borders and a subaltern subject position are available?

Re-examining poststructuralism from a postcolonial viewpoint, Alina Sajed rightly insists that 'in so far as most poststructuralist analyses in IR assume that the critique of the field's Eurocentrism is a sufficient gesture for decolonising IR without meaningfully engaging otherness and difference, they fail to transcend the West as a system of reference' (Sajed 2012: 143–44, see also Matin 2013b: 360). However, her criticism against 'the idealisation of the *native* as the *other*, the oppressed, and wronged/marginalised subject' must, in my view, be directed in an equal measure against mainstream postcolonial studies, especially in the field of IR. Where I fully agree with Sajed is her assertion that '[m]aintaining a tension between these two visions of the international and of otherness without attempting to reduce one to the other can be a productive exercise'. What my study strives to achieve in metatheoretical terms is to insert a difficult empirical case in the fissure between these two lines of thought. If this exercise yields a better understanding of Russia, it would be an important result. However, I also believe that in exploring difficult cases in a tense interchange between different theoretical approaches, each of those becomes better aware of its own problematic assumptions. Each situated perspective is probably 'necessarily partial' (Epstein 2014: 300), but such 'stress tests' might enable us to come up with generalisations that are both broader and better grounded in scholarly reflexion.

## **Internal colonisation and its outside**

If there is a body of literature that does apply a postcolonial approach in Russian studies, it is the literature on internal colonisation. In disciplinary terms, it is situated mostly in history and cultural anthropology and hardly ever touches upon the international except as a non-problematic background to developments within Russia. As I argue below, it does produce certain blind spots, but before I proceed to discuss them, this perspective needs to be introduced.

Internal colonisation has been defined as 'the use of the practices of colonial administration and knowledge within the state's political

boundaries' (Etkind et al. 2012: 12), a reflexive process that made Russian culture, 'in its different aspects and periods... both the subject *and* the object of orientalism' (Etkind 2011: 251). One of the essential elements that define the colonial situation is the existence of the cultural difference between the colonisers and the colonised (Etkind 2003: 111, Uffelmann 2012: 61). In Russia, this line was not between the Russians and the non-Russians, but between the Europeanised upper classes (nobility, officialdom, the intellectuals) and the masses, including the Russian peasants (Etkind 2011). It was visualised at the turn of the eighteenth century by Peter I's 'big shave' (noblemen being ordered to shave off their beards), but bordering was a wider and deeper phenomenon that unfolded over several centuries (Etkind 2002, 2011: 101–07).

As Alexander Etkind notes with a reference to Eugen Weber's (1976) classical study of West European nation building, the Russian experience of colonising the inner core of the empire (as opposed to its ethnically distinct periphery) is not completely without parallels: 'In France and Germany, the nationalization of agrarian culture was also similar to self-colonization: the "people", who were divided into classes, provinces, dialects, and sects, were transformed into a "nation"' (Etkind 2011: 254). There is, however, a crucial difference between nation building and internal colonisation: while the essence of the former consisted in the elimination of internal differences, imperial administrations sought to maintain and institutionalise them (Etkind et al. 2012: 24–5, see also Etkind 2011: 93–169). A more promising way of putting Russia's colonial experience in the international context opens up by using the concept of the frontier, as suggested by Mark Bassin (1993, see also Khodarkovsky 2002, Sunderland 2004). The related concept of internal colonialism has been applied to Latin America (Casanova 1965), the United Kingdom (Hechter 1975) and other regions, as well as – probably in a less systematic way – to Russia (Gouldner 1977).

The set of concepts centred on the notion of internal colonisation has a long history, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century; it has been broadly applied to both continental and overseas empires (Etkind et al. 2012: 18–22). In the imperial vocabulary, the term 'internal colonisation' initially had a positive meaning of appropriating and populating 'virgin' lands (Uffelmann 2012: 58–9), while its new and negative meaning is associated with both the nationalist (Slavophile) and Marxist critique and, later, with postcolonial studies. A closely related term, 'self-colonisation', apparently dates back to Boris Groys's essay (1993: 358) and was later taken up by Russian cultural studies (Kujundzic 2000,

Condee 2009). In the post-Soviet period, the term 'internal colonialism' was deployed polemically to indicate that certain regions of Russia were exploited by others, in particular by Moscow (Uffelmann 2012: 60–2). In Boris Kagarlitsky's writings on Russia as 'peripheral empire' the term 'self-colonisation' mostly retains analytical functions, although it certainly bears negative connotations (Kagarlitsky 2008, Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013).

Reflecting on the conceptual constellation around the notion of internal colonisation, Dirk Uffelmann (2012: 62–7) highlights the reflexive nature of the phenomenon, where inside and outside are locked in a complex interplay. Mutual othering between Russia and Europe manifests itself in two discursive developments that mirror each other – external Orientalisation of Russia by the Westerners and self-Orientalisation of the elites (see also Khalid 2000, Kobrin 2008). The latter produces self-colonisation, in the course of which the elites Europeanise, that is, internalise the European norm as universal. The cultural distance between the elites and the masses becomes more prominent with the progress of modernisation, and this finally creates a pattern of self-colonisation, combined with internal Orientalisation (of the masses by the elites). The end result is internal colonisation as a conscious effort, which manifests the full spectrum of colonial attitudes and practices, from the sense of a mission ('the burden of the shaven man', see Etkind 2002, 2011) to exploitation and violence. However, self-Orientalisation and internal Orientalism feed back into external Orientalism, intensifying mutual othering and re-enacting the whole cycle. There is also potential for internal decolonisation, which is always found in the discursive inventory and is actualised every now and then as a discursive and even political strategy (Uffelmann 2012: 72–8).

One box in Uffelmann's matrix remains conspicuously empty, however – the one at the intersection between the outside agency and colonisation as the material process that has a tangible effect on people's lives. In his view, Russia has been Orientalised by the outsiders, but colonised only by itself. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, in the international context, Russia can and must be seen as a subaltern, as an object of external colonisation that was integrated into the capitalist world-system on unequal terms. I insist that the concept of external colonisation needs to be applied to Russia not in metaphorical, but in a totally material sense – as material as it can get given that 'our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 454).



Given that Uffelmann's conceptual exercise clearly suggests looking into the external colonisation box at least as a deductively established possibility, his omission probably looks most surprising. However, he is certainly not alone in this: even in the texts that do play with the idea of Russia as an object of colonisation (e.g. Kujundzic 2000), being colonised is considered more as a facet of the universal human condition than as a concrete position in a hegemonic structure. Alternatively, Alexander Kiossev (2011) does see self-colonization as an externally driven process, but in his view it happened exclusively at the level of 'social imagination', 'beyond colonial realities – military occupation, political dominance, administrative rule, and economic exploitation', 'without violence or colonial "governmentality"'. Such an interpretation is probably due to Kiossev's geographical focus on the Central and East European countries, currently new members of the EU, rather than on Russia and other states of the post-Soviet space. Last but not least, Russian resource economy is highlighted by Etkind in his latest work (in particular, Etkind 2011: 72–90, 2014). Yet, it is still seen as an internal condition: Russia's embeddedness in the global structure of production and exchange is taken as a trivial fact of life and has little impact on the argument.

It is instructive to reflect on the reasons why this external aspect has been overlooked in the internal colonisation literature. The most obvious, and probably the most important, rationale for the refusal to see Russia as occupying a subaltern position is the fact that it has been colonised while remaining a sovereign state. The other, more precise way of putting this is that the Russian state has been and remains an instrument of colonisation: it colonised the country *on behalf* of the global capitalist core while itself being integrated into European international society. It is true that in non-Western countries whose transition to modernity occurred under the conditions of formal independence, 'the confrontation of abstract and concrete labor, to use Chakrabarty's model, is mediated, and arguably often overdetermined, by the geopolitics of (formally) independent states' (Matin 2013b: 363). At the same time, it is certainly wrong to leave the external dimension entirely to the geopolitical logic and to depict the Russian state as a colonising actor equal to its Western counterparts.

As a matter of fact, the image of Russia as a colony of Europe stands at the very beginning of the conceptual history of internal colonisation as a scholarly concept. According to Etkind (2011: 18), it was the nineteenth-century Slavophile, Aleksei Khomiakov, who 'characterized the educated society in Russia as "a colony of eclectic Europeans, thrown

into a country of savages”’. Khomiakov’s critique was refuted by Sergei Solovyov, who nevertheless did take on board the idea of Russian history being ‘the history of a country that colonises itself’ (quoted in Etkind 2011: 62). Etkind is right to point out that Solovyov’s emphasis on the reflexive aspects of Russian colonisation was a big step forward in the sense of converting an ideological contention into a scholarly concept. It also paved the way towards the subsequent anti-imperial revisions of internal colonisation (Etkind 2011: 61–71). However, in Solovyov’s re-configuration, as well as in the further elaboration of the concept by Vasily Kliuchevsky, the external dimension was trivialised. While focusing on the difference and oppression within the Russian empire, the literature on internal colonisation has almost completely missed the fact that this was a projection of global inequalities, sometimes of a significantly larger scale.

In a fascinating twist of conceptual history, the external dimension was brought up again in the debate between two Marxist thinkers – Mikhail Pokrovsky, a student of Kliuchevsky, and Leon Trotsky (see Etkind 2011: 86–87). Both agreed that ‘Russia’s development, by type, is the development of a colonial country’ (Pokrovsky 1922), and that it was to some extent externally driven. The key point of disagreement was whether Russia was to be considered a backward country. For Trotsky, this was the case, and the growth of capitalism in Russia was a typical example of uneven and combined development:

Arising late, Russian industry did not repeat the development of the advanced countries, but inserted itself into this development, adapting their latest achievements to its own backwardness.... Russian industry developed at certain periods with extraordinary speed.... In reality the possibility of this swift growth was determined by that very backwardness.

(Trotsky 1964: 9)

Pokrovsky (1922), on the contrary, insisted that

once it emerged, Russian capitalism, relying on all technical and organisational accomplishments of Western capitalism by that time, walked in seven-league boots, creating, with amazing speed, new forms of human life and making new ideologies, until, by the early twentieth century, Russia in this respect conclusively ‘caught up’ with Europe.

Pokrovsky admitted that backwardness and elements of colonial development remained in early twentieth-century Russia, but only in the periphery, and not in the imperial core. This emphasis on internal colonisation makes Etkind (2011: 86–87) side with Pokrovsky's criticism of Trotsky's theory of combined development and, once again, miss the crucial point that both Marxists shared: the fact that Russian capitalism and imperialism were part and parcel of the capitalist world-system.

Another explanation of the reification of Russia's formal sovereignty in the internal colonisation literature is the latter's disciplinary belonging: the conceptual and empirical core of this literature is located in such related fields as cultural anthropology, cultural and literary history and adjacent disciplines. The discussion in IR about the nature of political boundaries, initiated by the constructivist and poststructuralist turn (see, in particular, Walker 1993, Vaughan-Williams 2009), has made very little impact outside of the field, while the message that was received by other disciplines was mostly the neo-liberal truism about 'the blurring of boundaries' in the course of globalisation. It is symptomatic that Uffelmann quotes a passage from Gouldner's article about Russian peasantry under Stalin, which suggested, as far back as 1977, the need to take the discussion of colonialism outside of the conventional inside/outside paradigm: 'The analytic value of the notion of internal colonialism is that it is a step toward bridging the radical distinction commonly perceived between so-called international relations and internal social relationships, relations between states and those between classes' (Gouldner 1977: 14). This revolutionary idea, however, was formulated in a footnote, and 35 years later, Uffelmann does not take it further than stating, in an abstract way, that 'the artificial division between domestic politics and foreign policy now can be questioned' (2012: 71).

The second reason why the internal colonisation literature stops short of describing Russia as an object of colonisation is normative, or even ideological. In a way, the dispute between Khomiakov and Solovyov is still ongoing, and the ideological argument about Russia having been colonised externally is advanced by the people with whom the exponents of internal colonisation want to have nothing in common. These are Russian nationalists of every feather, from Stalinists to Solzhenitsyn:

[I]nternal colonisation often appears in the Soviet tradition as external and is demonised in this way – these devices are familiar by socialist realism, where, for instance, 'liberal intelligentsia' was portrayed as an agent of imperialism ... and by late Soviet and post-Soviet

nationalist rhetoric, where the revolution was written off as resulting from machinations by Jews, that is, ethnic aliens.

(Lipovetsky in Lipovetsky and Etkind 2008)

The historians' sensitivity is further exacerbated by the fact that internal colonisation theory itself has been denounced by texts applying the postcolonial perspective to postcommunist experiences. Moore's (2001) article calling for such a dialogue was a relatively lonely voice, but it took just a few years for this point to be accepted as commonsensical (see Hagen 2004, Buchowski 2006, Spivak et al. 2006, Chari and Verdery 2009). Today, one can list studies applying the postcolonial perspective to the former Soviet periphery, from the Baltic states (Kelertas 2006, Annus 2012, Platt 2012b) and Ukraine (Pavlyshyn 1992, Shkandrij 2001, Velychenko 2002, Chernetsky 2003, 2007, Ryabchuk 2011) to Central Asia (Gorshenina 2007, Tlostanova 2010, Abashin 2011, Mignolo and Tlostanova 2012), as well as to the countries of the former socialist bloc (Kovačević 2008, Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2012). This literature builds on the long-term tradition of the critique of Orientalism in the Western imagery of 'Eastern Europe', dating back to Larry Wolf's (1994) groundbreaking book. These studies, however, focus almost exclusively on the nations colonised by the tsarist empire and the Soviet Union; Russia figures here exclusively as a 'colonizer/occupant' (Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2012: 115). This makes their authors suspicious about the internal colonisation paradigm as an attempt to justify Russian and Soviet imperialism – inter alia, by describing the colonised territories of the currently independent states as being 'internal' to Russia (Frank 2003, Chernetsky 2007; cf. Uffelmann 2012: 61–62).

It must be admitted that this criticism is not entirely without merit: the whole edifice of *internal* colonisation is built on the formal definition of the political boundary as that of the Russian sovereign state, which makes it only logical to declare that there was nothing internal in it from the point of view of the other nations concerned. What makes colonisation 'internal' is that it takes place within one *political* space, but what differentiates it from nation building is the presence of a clearly defined cultural boundary. This whole logic is based on one extremely shaky assumption that the cultural can be clearly separated from the political, which postcolonialism rejects. At the same time, as some scholars warn, classifying Russia exclusively as the oppressor compromises the whole project of integrating postcolonial and postcommunist studies, which in this case slides into essentialism and Eurocentrism (Penzin 2010, Lazarus 2012: 126).

The only consistent way forward, then, consists in divesting the 'internal' in our understanding of Russia's colonisation of its foundational status and in reconceptualising the domain in which colonisation takes place as part of a single world-system, populated by different identities, politics and modes of production, but relationally tied into one system by the logic of capitalist development. The boundaries within this system are never only political, cultural or economic; they are overdetermined by the infinite multidimensionality of human practices. At the same time, overdetermination must not prevent us from seeing and naming elements of this world, such as states, nations, peoples or perhaps even civilisations, as long as we are aware that these boundaries are always problematic.

Another crucial conceptual move, which is hardly ever made in the literature under discussion, would consist in bringing on board the concept of hybridity. At the cost of, again, undermining the clear-cut distinction between the inside and the outside and thus the Hegelian opposition between the Slave and the Master, it would suggest interpreting postcolonial identities as interstitial, shaped by the colonial encounter rather than pre-existing it. For Russia, whose liminal position in many cultural and political spaces is a trivial fact of life, this approach is not just the most promising one; sometimes, as in the case of the internal colonisation problematique, it seems the only possible way to break away from what seems to have become a circular argument and enter a much wider domain of comparative and critical studies.

Nonetheless, as suggested by the earlier sections of this chapter, one needs to keep an eye on the blind spots of postcolonial theory itself, and especially on its normative agenda. After all, the anti-colonial suspicions about the tendency to downplay the oppressive effects of internal colonisation is to some extent justified: it does indeed 'exoticise' Russian colonialism, which might to some extent shield it from the criticism targeted against other empires. This criticism, however, displays a certain 'boomerang effect' – not completely unlike the 'return' of the practices of colonial coercion back to the mother countries as described by Arendt. Once the conceptual and empirical interrogation of Russian imperialism is radicalised by framing Russia as a subaltern empire, one has no other choice but to question the normative stance of the subaltern, at least of those subalterns who can speak (cf. Etkind 2011: 25–26).

The value of the Russian case for postcolonial studies consists exactly in the fact that, due to its liminal position, it defies binary oppositions between the East and the West, the centre and the periphery. As Etkind

writes, 'it is difficult to think about this historical phenomenon in terms of Platonic ideas of east and west. For many reasons, these ideas are awkward and difficult to handle'. I would, however, disagree with Etkind's description of the East and West in Russian culture 'as Heraclites' elements, which are free to mix in certain, though not any, combinations' (2011: 29). As I argue throughout this book, the Russian case is one of postcolonial hybridity, where none of the elements exists *before* the mixture, and what is culturally constructed as 'Eastern' or 'Western' is upon closer examination a product of overdetermined encounters across multiple, and heterogeneous, boundaries. It is not just East and West but also the material and the ideational 'economics', 'politics' and 'culture' that melt into each other and can be analytically connected in quite unexpected ways (e.g. Kalinin 2013). Indeed – and this is perhaps the central argument of the book – the (post)imperial and the (post)colonial expose themselves in the Russian space as two aspects of a universal human condition, natural consequences of modernity and capitalism. They can be separated neither in space, because colonialism affects each and every society, peripheral and central, nor in time. The prefix 'post' by no means indicates that we have left a certain political form behind – it is only a marker of our ability to reflect on these phenomena, to distinguish them, as ideal types, in our mind, rather than taking these forms as natural and organic.

# 2

## Russia in/and Europe: Sources of Ambiguity

While the previous chapter offered an introduction to my project from the postcolonial perspective, the present one does the same job in relation to the disciplinary field of International Relations (IR), with the empirical focus on Russia. As I pointed out in the introduction, I am mostly interested in the approaches that view domestic and international politics as an integral whole and search for explanations at the intersections between different levels of analysis. This is still a vast body of literature to review, but this chapter concentrates on the approaches that try to account for the specificity of Russian political developments (including foreign policy) by looking at Russia's historical experience and role in the world. This points, very broadly, in the direction of constructivist Russian foreign policy studies. I am less interested in rationalist approaches to IR and comparative politics – for the very simple reason that I have very little to say there. Constructivism, on the contrary, could significantly benefit from engaging with postcolonial theory, not just in terms of its own research agenda but also as regards the dialogue with other subfields of Russian studies (such as history, cultural anthropology and the like). This potential contribution is due to the positioning of postcolonial theory in three important respects: regarding the level of analysis, generalisability and the agency–structure problem.

Situating her own conceptualisation of the 'interstitial' states (with the case studies focusing on Japan, Russia and Turkey) in the existing literature, Ayşe Zarakol (2011: 17–21) differentiates between 'sociological' and 'psychological' trends in constructivism. 'Sociological' constructivism, epitomised by the works of Alexander Wendt (especially his 1999 book), strives to work out a systemic IR theory and thus aspires for maximum generalisation. While such an approach was best suited to

challenge the rationalist mainstream of the late twentieth century, inter alia, by achieving a sufficient degree of generalisation to match Waltzian neorealism (see Kratochwil 2000), it came at the expense of being unable to account for the uniqueness of each individual actor. 'Psychological' constructivism, in its turn, pays much more attention to the domestic sources of foreign policy, focusing above all on identity construction, but is often unable to project its findings to the systemic level in a more than superficial way.

While I differ with Zarakol's labelling and rather see both types of constructivism as sociological, I nevertheless agree that the task of bridging between abstract generalisations and case-specific accounts still remains to be accomplished. The strength of postcolonial theory in this respect consists in the fact that it aims for a certain level of generalisation, while allowing for enough sensitivity to individual cases, insisting that all thought must foreground concrete experiences. This is combined with a strong emphasis on structure, which, in the final analysis, enables one to address the specificity of each case as resulting from a unique constellation of structural factors. In terms of level of analysis, the postcolonial approach suggests a view that integrates second- and third-image explanations: its ontology implies that the international system and individual societies are mutually constitutive. Hence, there is a potential for a constructive dialogue with the 'second-image reversed' literature in IR (Gourevitch 1978, Zarakol 2013), especially with the critical literature on the expansion of international society.

As I showed in Chapter 1, we might need a fresh look at the conceptualisation of colonial difference (cultural vs. political) as well as at the normative agenda of postcolonial studies. Yet, as long as this need is duly taken into account, a reassessment from the vantage point of postcolonialism could push Russian studies towards a more comparative and structural approach. In my view, this would be a welcome move away from too much concentration on Russia's presumed or self-proclaimed uniqueness. At the same time, as this comparativist impulse would be moderated by sensitivity to context, it would not go as far as merging the case into the flat variable-oriented landscape of comparative politics, whose underlying logic is very different from both the constructivist and postcolonial ones.

This chapter opens by summarising the findings of the existing approaches to Russian identity politics and then focuses on one particular question to which, as I see it, we still do not have a satisfactory answer. This is the question of the origins of Russia's rather special, undecidable position within the Eurocentric global order and in



particular Russia's problematic European identity. By reviewing previous studies addressing this question, I demonstrate that a comprehensive answer needs to take into account the inequality inherent in the way the global political space is structured and the fact that Russia occupies a relatively peripheral, subordinated position in this hierarchy. It is my contention that most of the existing literature does not address this inequality in any systematic manner, and even those studies that take this fact into account tend to interpret it more as a contingent outcome of historical developments rather than as a structurally determined phenomenon.

It seems that there are two bodies of IR literature that provide most adequate accounts of Russia's predicament with enough linkage to the systemic level. On the one hand, critical revisions of the English School perspective on the expansion of international society demonstrate that, due to its Eurocentric nature, the latecomers faced serious problems internalising this normative order. On the other hand, ontological security theory could provide a useful insight into what exactly happens when the outsiders face the profound ambiguity of their international status. Even if both approaches are combined, however, we still face a number of fundamental questions. How does the hierarchy between the inside and the underside of international society come about? What is the status of the boundary between the inside and the underside? Why do the latecomers feel compelled to internalise the norms they cannot fully identify with? I argue that turning to psychological explanations does not do the trick here, producing instead a range of methodological complications. On the contrary, the notion of hegemony, as developed in both postcolonial and poststructuralist theories, provides important insights, which could be further deepened by applying postcolonial theory to Russia and other similar cases in a systematic way.

It should perhaps be emphasised that what I am interested in is a rather broad structural perspective, which cannot account for individual foreign policy decisions. In terms of Martin Hollis and Steve Smith's (1991) classical dichotomy (dating back to Max Weber), relying on postcolonial theory is most beneficial for the understanding of IR, while it can hardly add much in terms of explaining certain specific foreign policy moves. Thus, I am by no means suggesting that the postcolonial perspective is better as an explanatory framework for variable-oriented foreign policy analysis – an agency-centred approach that is primarily concerned with establishing causal links between observed phenomena (see for example Snyder et al. 1962). Rather, it can contribute to the understanding of postcommunism as a certain

structural condition, which is in many fundamental respects similar to the situation in the postcolony. As an interpretative approach, it cannot focus exclusively on foreign policy action and must include an analysis of its material and discursive preconditions. It is based on the assumption that any political action is overdetermined and therefore cannot be fully accounted for within any single and straightforward explanatory framework. In contrast, drawing parallels between different historical and geographical contexts can ensure much needed critical distance from common-sense interpretations of political reality and provide deeper insight into the mechanisms of power distribution in world politics.

### **Russian identity politics: How much do we know?**

The focus on identity and discourses as a means to better understand foreign policy was introduced by the constructivist approach at a very early stage in its development, and Russia has always figured prominently in this literature as a revealing case (Neumann 1996, 1999, Checkel 1997, Prizel 1998, Williams and Neumann 2000, Hopf 2002, 2013). The significance of this research has recently been recognised by more mainstream policy analysis, which started to include ideologies, debates and world views not just as variables (which had always been done in rationalist foreign policy analysis) but also as a 'medium' through which other factors often work (cf. Nau 2012: 8).

As a result of a cumulative effort of a large number of scholars, one can confidently say that we have a reasonably good understanding of Russian identity politics in its historical evolution and structural conditionality. It is probably safe to conclude that most of the existing approaches converge in describing Russia's position in Europe as undecidable, liminal and/or peripheral. This implies that Russian political developments are to a large extent determined by Russia's simultaneous belonging to and exclusion from Europe (understood as a political community). This broad diagnosis is shared by a number of perspectives ranging from mainstream constructivism to poststructuralism. World-systems theory, English School and critical IR theory would also agree with this assessment, although their interest in Russia remains relatively limited.

Within Russia, identity politics takes the form of the competition among several discourses which produce conflicting articulations of Russian identity either as part of European modernity, alternative (e.g. Soviet) modernity or unique self-sufficient civilisation (Hopf 2002,

Kuchins and Zevelev 2012). It is also about the (missing) recognition of Russia by Europe (or the West) as a legitimate international actor and a great power (Ringmar 2002, Neumann 2008), as well as Russia's attempts to challenge Western hegemony by insisting on its right to interpret universal values (Morozov 2008). Russia's attempts to socialise into the modern international system (Zarakol 2011) are only marginally successful because, in spite of its belonging to Europe, it is never included (Prozorov 2008) or, at most, is expected to accept hierarchical inclusion (Prozorov 2009c). The undecidability of Russia's position in Europe has a long history (Neumann 1996) and has to do with the fact that both European and Russian identities have been to a large extent shaped by mutual othering (Neumann 1999).

While this constitutive ambiguity and underlying mutual othering provides a perfect point of departure for the analysis of Russian domestic politics and foreign policy, it also invites the question about its own foundations and origins (in the sense of constitutive causation rather than genealogy). Othering and negativity, in general, are omnipresent political phenomena; they might even have definitional significance marking out the domain of the political (see for example Mouffe 1999b, 2005, Prozorov 2011). Thus, there must be something else that contributed to the stabilisation of Russia's position as Europe's Other, making it a persistent and in many respects a defining feature of national identity. Existing literature, for the most part, confines itself to establishing the presence of this obstinate ambiguity and drawing parallels with other similar cases, such as Turkey, Japan, Iran or China (Zarakol 2011, Morozov and Rumelili 2012, Nau and Ollapally 2012).

Zarakol describes this perspective as 'psychological', while I would prefer to classify it as case oriented and pitched predominantly at the second level of analysis. This body of literature is certainly rather diverse: it includes studies embracing individualist ontology, which roots the intersubjective reality of discourse in the emotional and cognitive capacity of human beings (Hopf 1998, 2002, Ringmar 2002),<sup>1</sup> poststructuralist research based on the ontological primacy of discourse (Prozorov 2004, 2009a, Morozov 2009), as well as those occupying the middle ground by, for example, looking at sociological factors and individual contributions to the evolution of discursively grounded identity (Guzzini 2012).

In spite of its truly great achievements, this perspective remains rather limited in terms of its generalisation capacity beyond an individual case. Even when it conceptualises identity, norms and culture as independent variables (e.g. Herman 1996), it still struggles with the fact that

ideational factors remain case specific and cannot be operationalised in any uniform way. The case-oriented approach can provide useful genealogical accounts of how specific forms of othering came into being – accounts that can span several centuries (Neumann 1996, 1999, 2008, Prizel 1998) or focus on a particular period, linking identity construction and policy outcomes (Matz 2001, Tsygankov 2006, Morozov 2009, Hopf 2012). They can also compare similar mechanisms of identity politics at work in different, relatively narrowly defined national contexts, as exemplified by the impeccably designed study of geopolitical thinking and its relationship with identity crises by Stefano Guzzini (2012) and his collaborators. Yet, arguably the most useful product of these case-oriented studies are various mappings of the Russian discursive space. In spite of their variety, they all agree on certain fundamental structural points, and therefore one might conclude that we have a solid ground for further research, including comparative endeavours.

Most of these mappings build on the widely known opposition between the Slavophiles and the Westernisers, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. As historians demonstrated a long time ago, this debate also included a third element – the supporters of autocracy – which most of the time had the state on their side (see for example Riasanovsky 1959, Walicki 1975, Neumann 1996). The representations of the current discursive field as structured by the opposition between the pro-Western liberals and the anti-Western nationalists are therefore oversimplifications, usually derived from textbook knowledge. Academic studies normally identify at least three or four ways to define Russia's position in world affairs. Thus, Andrey Tsygankov (2006) categorises the participants of the Russian foreign policy debate as the integrationists, the nationalist hardliners, the balancers and the great-power normalisers. Andrew Kuchins and Igor Zevelev (2012) distinguish between pro-Western liberals, great power balancers and nationalists. Anne Clunan (2009: 53–100) draws a slightly more complex picture, identifying five 'national self-images', four 'national identity management strategies' and three types of 'foreign policy orientations'.

As Ted Hopf's landmark study (2002) demonstrated in a particularly convincing manner, these three- or four-pronged classifications are based on more than academic inertia. Methodologically rigorous inductive research conducted by Hopf yielded a very similar result – a mapping consisting of four discourses: the New Western Russian, the New Soviet Russian, the Liberal Essentialist and the Liberal Relativist. It is also indicative that a comparison of foreign policy debates across the 'aspiring powers' demonstrate 'cross-national similarity of the spectrum

of relevant foreign policy schools' (Mirilovic and Ollapally 2012: 210). Not just in Russia but also in China, India, Iran and Japan, the main three camps are realists, nationalists and globalists, while a fourth camp (idealists) exists only in some cases, and only in the Iranian case it can be described as probably the most influential (Mirilovic and Ollapally 2012: 211–15). This finding suggests the need to explore the underlying reasons for this structural similarity of discursive landscapes. This question, however, has been bracketed out in this literature – either as a matter of a conscious methodological choice (Hopf 2002, Nau and Ollapally 2012) or by default. The emphasis instead has been on identifying the main discourses and examining their impact on foreign policy making. Even though there is no space in this book for systematic cross-national comparisons, I would argue that subaltern experiences are the key reason for the convergence of discursive landscapes.

Similarly, the literature focusing on the state of Russian IR as a discipline has mainly concentrated on the peculiarities of theoretical developments in Russia as compared to global trends. While the standing of Anglo-Saxon IR as setting the universal norm has quite often been approached in a critical manner, the main purpose of this distancing is normally to see if and how Russian (along with other non-Western) IR can contribute to the global debates, not least in the sense of making them less Eurocentric (e.g. Wæver and Tickner 2009). It is indicative that most of the studies looking at the Russian IR debates from the point of view of theoretical schools rather than societal discourses still ended up having to define these schools through the prism of identities or ideologies, rather than in terms of their ontological, epistemological or methodological concerns (see for example Sergounin 2000, 2009, Tsygankov 2008, Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2010). The prevalence of identity over theory as a driving force of disciplinary development, however, has not so far become a matter of serious reflection, and the significance of this fact in the context of Russia's nagging anxiety about its unequal standing vis-à-vis the West remains to be explored (for an attempt to do that, see Makarychev and Morozov 2013).

Part of the reason why constructivist accounts of Russia's identity often fail to pay sufficient attention to the inequality inherent in the relations between Russia and the West has to do with the genealogy of the constructivist paradigm as such. When it started to develop as a distinct approach within the disciplinary field of IR, it had to establish itself first and foremost against the 'materialist' explanatory frameworks. Constructivists therefore tended to overemphasise the distinction between the 'material' and the 'ideational' or 'symbolic' and thus overlooked

the value of a more complex understanding of power and hegemony (Guzzini 2000; for notable exceptions, see also Hopf 1998 and Guzzini 2005). This also often led to a narrow focus on second-image accounts – national identity construction, discourses and so on – in which the outside world was present as populated by ‘the Others’ (Neumann 1999), but ‘the Self’ was hardly ever analysed as part of a wider international system.

A rare exception is Michael C. Williams and Iver B. Neumann’s (2000) article on NATO-Russia relations, in which they reach out to the systemic level by demonstrating how ‘symbolic power’ possessed by the West narrowed down the political choice available to the Russian leadership. However, while aiming to prove that ‘symbolic power’ inherent in the idea of a security community was in this case more instrumental in comparison with economic or military power, the authors say nothing about the sources of this normative superiority. Even though the relationship between NATO and Russia, as it is described in the article, can easily be reconceptualised as hegemony, Williams and Neumann stop short of this crucial step, and do not provide any explanation for the origins of the inequality they so brilliantly describe.

In his recent important article, Ted Hopf (2013) makes an attempt to move beyond the single-case perspective by emphasising possible similarities between Russia and other semi-peripheral countries, in particular the BRICS. Unfortunately, the comparative agenda remains only a suggestion, while the core argument consists in demonstrating a causal link between Russian common sense and the country’s peripherality: ‘The objective material position of Russia can be explained by Russian common sense’ (2013: 344). The latter is understood in a neo-Gramscian way, as a structural variable referring to the sum of popular beliefs which are uncritically, with little or no reflection, shared by the masses and serve as the ultimate source of intelligibility and legitimacy (2013: 321–3).

According to Hopf, while the elites strive to bring the country closer to the West, ‘common sense is hindering any Russian movement from the semi-periphery to the core of Western hegemony’ and thus ‘has an effect on the distribution of power in the international system’ (2013: 348). There is therefore an obvious gap between the elite discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other, both Russian common sense and the country’s material position vis-à-vis the hegemonic core. To sustain this argument, Hopf has to postulate a sharp contrast in the outlook between the elites and the masses, a distinction that starts to unravel when the author is forced, in the aftermath of the 2011–12 mass protests, to add

a footnote admitting that 'mass common sense has one collection of taken-for-granted ideas about the good life, while urban middle classes have quite a different one' (2013: 344).

It turns out, however, that subtracting the urban middle class (i.e. the bulk of the politicised public whose political views are explicitly formulated – *inter alia*, in the blogosphere) from the masses leaves common sense somewhat devoid of substance. Mostly, it is reduced to Soviet nostalgia, which is assumed to be incompatible with neo-liberal capitalism. This is obviously a problematic assumption. A case can easily be made for interpreting Hopf's sources (such as Alexandra Marinina's novels) as cherishing the memories of depoliticised, 'cosy' aspects of the Soviet life: family, home, stability, Soviet practices of consumption and so on – all those bourgeois values that ultimately undermined the mobilising potential of the Soviet system and prepared the society for the restoration of capitalism. Putting interpretations aside, even more serious questions need to be raised about the nature of Soviet modernity and the degree to which it can be legitimately interpreted as an alternative to Western capitalism.

Hopf is aware of this problem, but insists that 'while Russian common sense is as enamoured of Western material accomplishments as elite discourse, it wishes to consume them, but not adopt the neo-liberal practices that elite discourse think is necessary to attain them' (2013: 345). This assertion might be correct to some extent, but again, it runs the risk of overstating the difference between the elite's explicit promotion of neo-liberal norms and the alleged sceptical attitudes of the masses – the attitudes to which we as scholars have no direct access. It might turn out, on the contrary, that the gap is between normative discourses and practical attitudes of *both* groups, and thus they stand much closer to each other than Hopf's analysis suggests. This might be particularly true in the case of anti-corruption campaigns, which Hopf classifies as rooted in the elite neo-liberal ideology. As evidenced by the brief but remarkable triumph of Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption activist-turned opposition politician, the anti-corruption rhetoric enjoys much wider support than only among the narrowly defined urban middle class, but this does not really change everyday practices of either group (Pavlova 2014).

What is at stake here is not, after all, the accuracy of any particular interpretation, but a wider question about the significance of the Russian case. Hopf's causal argument hinges on his assessment of Russian common sense, which largely remains a thing in itself, a contingent given not conditioned by any other factors. It is a contributing factor, rather than an effect, of Russia's inability to overcome

its semi-peripheral status. This approach is hardly conducive to international comparisons: even if we find the same type of causality in other cases, the fact that common sense remains a dead end would prevent us from establishing any structural similarities. The context-specific character of the key independent variable would make coherent operationalisation impossible.

The postcolonial approach warns against analysing such phenomena in terms of one-way causal links. To begin with, Hopf's assumption that common sense is directly accessible through appropriate sources might be untenable. In Spivak's (1999) terms, while his study *speaks of* the subaltern, it actually runs a serious risk of *speaking for* her by claiming to be able to reconstruct subaltern consciousness in the Eurocentric language of social theory. Furthermore, we would be much better off if we could overcome the dualism between the material and the ideational (again, this opposition is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3) and to view material peripherality and discursive/normative dependency as two aspects of the subaltern condition. While using postcolonial theory alone would not be sufficient to achieve that, its insights might prove indispensable in a serious discussion of these issues.

### **International society and its underside**

Another important insight into the condition of semi-peripheral states in the Eurocentric world is provided by the critical reassessment of the concept of international society (Bull 1977), the cornerstone of the English School in IR. The English School authors working on the expansion of international society recognise the presence of inequality between insiders and outsiders. However, it is mostly taken for granted as the driver for expansion: Europe's technological progress, as it intensified in the early modern age, led to both military (Howard 1984) and economic (O'Brien 1984) superiority, which motivated other states to learn from Europe by adopting the standard of 'civilisation' (Gong 1984). This is exactly what happened with Russia: the Russian case in this view 'illustrates many of the characteristic features of a non-Western civilization which . . . Westernized and modernized itself by its own decision rather than by conquest, but was induced to do so by the pressure of European expansion' (Watson 1984: 73, see also Bull 1984: 218–19).

Thus, the centre–periphery relationship in modern world politics occurred naturally and did not have any irreversible consequences for either side, as the centre remained relatively open and could be accessed by imitation and learning. Even when non-Western states challenge



the existing world order, this is usually confined to its particular elements and is aimed at the redistribution of benefits within the system rather than at any radical change of its guiding principles (Bull 1984). Arguably, this is also the implicit assumption in the literature on 'norm diffusion', which is typically traced back to the influential article by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998, for critical overviews, see Epstein 2012, Adler-Nissen 2014, Zarakol 2014). In its other aspects, this understanding is close to David Lake's (2009) contractual theory of international hierarchy, in which the latter is understood as a set of mutually beneficial arrangements between the rulers, who provide social order, and the subordinates, who agree to limit their freedom for the sake of predictability and security. Even though norms, identity and orientalist othering are sometimes emphasised in such accounts (Hobson and Sharman 2005), they still overlook the qualitative differences between the modes of development in the core and in the periphery.

Contrariwise, according to critical accounts, European expansion has been a deeply problematic process. While the English School sees international society as based on the principle of tolerance and coexistence, its relations with the outsiders had been driven by the belief in the superiority of European civilisation and the need to spread it by all means, including through force and colonisation (Keene 2002, Keal 2003). The relatively more successful latecomers internalised both patterns of order in world politics – toleration and civilisation (Keene 2002: 97–119). As argued by Shogo Suzuki (2009), this is what explains Japan's turn to imperialism in the late nineteenth century: Japanese leaders believed that creating their own empire would bring them closer to being recognised as equals by the dominant international players. Moreover, Zarakol contends that even though Japan was relatively successful during the early stages of its imperial pursuit, the process of socialisation into the pre-existing normative order was nevertheless accompanied by stigmatisation. The ruling elites, having accepted Eurocentric hierarchies, believed that 'their countries were "behind" the West in every aspect' (2011: 56). There was always a hope to catch up and become equal members of the core, but once the stigma is internalised, escaping this mode of relating to the outside world becomes extremely difficult.

Another aspect of the problem is the inherent instability of many peripheral states, especially the former colonies that joined the international society in the twentieth century. As demonstrated by Mohammed Ayoob (1995), the contradictory imperatives of adjusting to the liberal international normative order, on the one hand, and consolidating

their sovereign statehood, on the other, produce a strong feeling of insecurity, which, in turn, motivated many of these states to resist international norms as an instrument of Western dominance. Accordingly, while the hegemonic perspective 'emphasizes order among states and justice within them', the subaltern view 'stresses order within states and justice among them' (Ayoob 2010: 130). In addition, the weakness of the postcolonial state produces a peculiar security dilemma, in which security of the state and of the population are at odds (Sørensen 2001: 103–25).

Critical constructivist re-conceptualisations of the English School, especially the work of Suzuki and Zarakol, stand out as particularly significant contributions to the study of semi-peripheral states' position in the international system. They suggest a general frame of analysis that potentially applies to all structurally similar cases, and in doing that construct a valuable analytical link between the system and unit levels of analysis.

Despite obvious parallels between these studies and postcolonial thought, there is little substantial engagement with postcolonial theory at the ontological and conceptual level. I would argue that this creates a tendency to underestimate the degree to which the European international society and its outside – or, rather, its underside – stand in a mutually constitutive relationship.

The fact that Suzuki, following Edward Keene, insists on international society being of *dual* nature – equality inside, imperialism outside – is indicative in this regard. The emphasis on duality tends to obfuscate the indispensable role that colonialism played in the construction of the European liberal normative order – indeed, as Charlotte Epstein (2014: 300) maintains, '[i]n a postcolonial perspective, colonization appears as a crucial ordering mechanism of the contemporary state system' (see also Seth 2013c). The dualistic metaphor underestimates the degree of involvement of the outsiders, in various forms, in the reproduction of unequal relations between the periphery and the core. This latter point is highlighted by Ayoob (1995), who demonstrates that the countries of the Third World have a vested interest in the preservation of the current world order, even as they occasionally challenge the injustices associated with Western dominance.

Both Suzuki and Zarakol treat modernity as a given, although contingent and problematic, reality of the West, while the peripheral nations enter the scene as absolute outsiders that have to internalise the rules of the game. Georg Sørensen, while explicitly distancing himself from the English School, is also inclined to reify modernity and pre-modernity as

social types. In his account, states evolve as 'modern', 'postmodern' or 'postcolonial' under the pressure of conflicting logics of homogeneity and heterogeneity, but Western modernity is treated as the point of origin for all future developments, setting in motion these contradictory processes, but not influenced by the outside developments. Predictably, Sørensen has trouble fitting Russia into his classification: he seems to suggest that the Soviet Union was a *sui generis* state, an "'unlike" unit' (Sørensen 2001: 36–47), while contemporary Russia, China and India are described as 'large countries that display a combination of the features of weak postcolonial, modern, and postmodern statehood' (2001: 182).

While acknowledging the mutual conditioning of domestic and international politics, all of these authors equate the international with the Western, and the Western with the universal. The domestic, on the contrary, is the realm of the particular, which can be problematic, deviant, and thus needs to be corrected or at least somehow rationalised.<sup>2</sup> To be fair, Zarakol (2011: 62–82) does provide a genealogical account of the Westphalian inside–outside divide and even discusses the Master–Slave dialectic, which is also central to postcolonial thinking. Subsequently, however, she treats the trajectories of the two groups of states as completely separate and driven exclusively by the dynamics within the West. The outsiders, she writes, 'had to recreate themselves as "modern" states against a backdrop of an emerging international society of states that had already made the transition *organically*' (2009: 38, emphasis added). As a result, she tends to present the border of the Westphalian system as clear-cut and almost impenetrable: 'The European society of states and its Standard of Civilization is best understood as a closed social stratum of actors, who used a collectivist criterion of closure to exclude non-members' (2011: 53–4).

Operating in binary oppositions of inside/outside, equality and imperialism leads Suzuki to a rather one-sided criticism of contemporary Western policies:

democratic governance has become the new 'standard of civilization' of today, and... members of the liberal democratic 'developed world' have taken it upon themselves to act as the contemporary 'civilizers' with the *noblesse oblige* to spread this normative ideal across the world.

By suspending the sovereignty of such states and ruling them on behalf of their populations, we should recognize that International

Society is deeming the peoples of these so-called 'rogue' polities to be incapable of governing their own affairs and effectively treating them as children.

(2009: 183)

This is certainly a valid criticism, which is widely shared by authors sceptical about the paradigms of 'transition' and 'democracy promotion' (e.g. Chandler 2006, Koelble and Lipuma 2008, Hobson 2012). However, it runs a serious risk of sliding into the opposite extreme of relativism, ending up with an apology for imperialism and oppression. Imperial pursuits can be justified as resistance to Western dominance, while oppression is often accepted as the lesser evil, based on the argument that some sort of order is needed before one can meaningfully talk about rights (Ayoob 2002, 2010).

As pointed out in the previous chapter, postcolonial theory is not immune to the temptation, either, but it does possess enough critical potential to avoid the relativist trap. The solution consists in abandoning binary oppositions and reconceptualising core-periphery relations as a combined phenomenon that produces the entire set of identities and norms involved. Both the modern nation state and the capitalist economy are products of interaction and hybridisation between the core and the periphery, which left a deep impact on social structures and identities across the board (Seth 2013c). Moreover, as argued by John Hobson (2004, 2013), European modernity originated in a then-peripheral region of the world dominated by 'Oriental globalisation'. All of these points are more than relevant for the semi-peripheral empires, which by definition are located between the colonialist core and the colonised periphery.

To recap, the value of a critical reassessment of the English School view of the expansion of international society consists first and foremost in problematising the image of the latter process as natural and non-violent. By doing that, the critical international society literature makes a great contribution to the analysis of how integration into hegemonic order affects the development of semi-peripheral societies. However, it seems that one needs to find a better way of dealing with the ontological status of the difference between the West and the non-West, which would avoid the Eurocentric appropriation of modernity by the West and describing the non-West as inherently different, unstable and insecure. One obvious solution would be to say that this difference is 'cultural', but it is easy to show that this way leads to a dead end.

## **Cultural difference and political boundaries: Too much is too little**

In a certain sense, viewing political boundaries as based on cultural difference is a self-evident solution: each society almost by definition is distinguished from others by cultural markers. Besides, we normally take different cultures to be of equal value, which could, in principle, help mitigate the Eurocentrism of the English School-oriented approaches. The most obvious candidate here is the multiple modernities theory, which explicitly postulates that 'modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only "authentic" modernities, though they enjoy historical preference and continue to be a basic reference point for others'. Modernity is thus understood as a 'continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes' (Eisenstadt 2000: 2–3). The essentialist type of civilisational analysis, epitomised by Samuel Huntington's oft-criticised texts (1993, 1996), also prioritises cultural criteria as distinguishing civilisations from each other. Champions of multiple modernities denounce the essentialist civilisational approach for failing to see that the essential attributes of the modernity – individualist view of human agency, critical reflexivity and the awareness of the contingency of any social order – are not uniquely Western phenomena. Nevertheless, the emphasis on culture as such leads to some striking similarities in the images of the world and the understanding of world politics. Like Huntington, the proponents of 'multiple modernities' tend to give precedence to religion in defining culture and thus speak about 'Judeo-Christian', 'Islamic' and 'Hindu' civilisations, along with 'Latin American', 'Sinic' or 'Japanese' (cf. Schmidt 2006: 80).

With such criteria applied, Russia can only be subsumed under the Judeo-Christian or European civilisation or, in a more West-centric classification, come out as the pivot of a separate Orthodox Christian world (Huntington 1996: 163–6). Even the second taxonomy, however, does not really do justice to Russia's distinctiveness as a subaltern empire, if only because it introduces an unnecessarily sharp difference between parts of Russia's colonial periphery: Russia is lumped together with Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, while Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states are placed within a different, Islamic civilisation. Attempts to mitigate this by introducing the concepts of 'cleft countries' and the like (Huntington 1996: 166) are hardly satisfactory as they have to take into account historical facts of a different order (such as geopolitics) and thus deviate from the original premise of the theory.

This highlights a more general issue: any difference can be described as cultural, and the only way of using 'culture' as an objective measure of political difference is to rely on pre-given, essentialist conceptual matrices that prioritise some types of cultural difference over others. In effect, 'culture' is thus narrowed down to religion, race or some other marker, functioning as a synecdoche. A more methodologically rigorous approach consists in clearly delineating culture from other factors and operationalising it as a variable in comparative research (cf. Elkins and Simeon 1979). In this case, however, we are back to square one in answering our original question about the ontological status of political boundaries, since the notion of culture no longer exhausts it. Finally, one could interpret culture not as a summary of objective differences between societies, but as a signifier that members of these societies use to account for such differences that are relevant for them.

Thus, as Gregorio Bettiza (2014) points out in his useful overview of the civilisational analysis literature, this analytical framework is by no means limited to essentialist perspectives. He follows Patrick Jackson (2010) in highlighting the difference between 'scholarly specification ontology' and 'participant-specification ontology'. In the latter case, the scholar is 'engaged in interpreting how human actors themselves individually and collectively see and describe the world around them in civilizational terms' (Bettiza 2014: 6). While he certainly supports such a move, Bettiza (2014: 10–13) also warns that critical approaches to civilisational analysis might be focusing too much on how civilisational identities are essentialised in the West. Another criticism that could be added unfolds along the lines of one of the key arguments of this book: similar to postcolonial theory (and indeed inspired by the latter), critical civilisational analysis gravitates towards assigning normative priority to the subject positions located outside the West. Since non-Western identities are essentialised and othered in Western orientalist discourses, they almost by definition enjoy sympathy with the critical analysts. What tends to be downplayed in this literature is not just self-essentialisation of non-Western identities (Bettiza 2014: 11) but also the 'domestic' oppression that goes along with it.

Bettiza's more balanced 'civilisational politics' approach, focused on how the idea of civilisations is used in political discourse, is certainly applicable to Russia and probably many other semi-peripheral nations. It is typical for the nationalist articulations of Russian national identity to describe Russia as a separate civilisation, while liberal Westernisers would use the word in the singular, indicating their preference for catch-up modernisation. However, the contribution of such analysis beyond

helping us better understand individual cases would be limited. In fact, it could be argued that Suzuki and Zarakol have already accomplished this task in their studies of how latecomers socialised into the international society. 'Civilisational politics' brings in little new in comparison with critical international society studies, as it has to leave out (and for good reason) those essentialist elements of civilisational analysis which make the latter stand out as a distinctive approach. It would therefore seem that theories which take culture as their foundational concept do not help us in dealing with the Eurocentric assumptions of critical international society studies. The concept of culture offers too little by promising too much: it potentially subsumes any difference that can play out in identity politics and therefore cannot allow for focused analysis of the interplay between the domestic and the international.

### **Is the underside ontologically insecure?**

An alternative solution would consist in moving culture to the background and instead bringing forward security. This move is suggested, for instance, by the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which builds on the English School and securitisation theory to offer a way of dealing with the regional dynamics within international society (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The RSCT, however, has the same problem as the classical English School (and, for that matter, civilisational analysis), being unable to account for the hegemonic nature of international society.

Ontological security theory holds more promise – not just because it has been used by critical international society scholars (e.g. Zarakol 2010) but also due to the fact that it clearly resonates with Ayoob's (1995) explanatory framework discussed above. This framework needs to be adjusted somewhat in view of what has been said about the tendency both in the English School and its critical revisions to associate modernity exclusively with the West. Ayoob assumes that Third World states are inherently unstable, torn apart by internal rifts as they struggle for the loyalties of their ethnically diverse populations. In fact, many core Western states also feel increasingly challenged by separatism and the lack of legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. At the same time, the relatively stable semi-peripheral states, such as Russia and Venezuela, have enough resources to invest in a counter-hegemonic effort and thus to present a credible challenge to Western dominance. While the weakest states are, in the actual fact, struggling to establish and maintain domestic order (and thus often have to rely on Western support), it is the relatively independent players who are most vocal in

complaining about Western intervention. This means that the dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony are more complex than the binary opposition between the dominant and the subaltern on which Ayooob analysis is based.

Generally speaking, the problem of legitimacy is central to any state, and the task of maintaining domestic order can never be completely put aside for the sake of focusing on something else. This is the core of the paradox that Chantal Mouffe (1999a: 50) notes in Carl Schmitt's defence of the unity of the state against political pluralism:

The unity of the state must, for him, be a concrete unity, already given and therefore stable. This is also true of the way he envisages the identity of the people: it also must exist as a given . . . His position is, in fact, ultimately contradictory. On the one hand, he seems seriously to consider the possibility that pluralism could bring about the dissolution of the unity of the state. If that dissolution is, however, a distinctive *political* possibility, it also entails that the existence of such a unity is itself a contingent fact which requires a political construction. On the other hand, however, the unity is presented as a *factum* whose obviousness could ignore the political conditions of its production. Only as a result of this sleight of hand can the alternative be as inexorable as Schmitt wants it to be.

The reverse argument is also true: if any unity is politically constructed, there is always a possibility to securitise pluralism and outside intervention as undermining domestic political stability.<sup>3</sup> While the relative weakness of political institutions might qualify as a facilitating condition for such securitising move (see Buzan et al. 1998: 31–3), much would also depend on the discursive tradition of opposing the national Self against a powerful external Other. As this logic predicts, securitisation of subversive Others works even in the most stable polities (as exemplified by the success of radical right-wing movements in Western Europe and the United States), but gets the best chances of occupying the political mainstream in the countries with a long history of struggling to get to the core – such as Russia or Turkey. Once again, this highlights the combined relational dynamics affecting all identities involved, rather than just the 'weaker' players.

If any political unity is potentially unstable, we could benefit from a general theoretical framework capable of accounting for the anxiety inherent in the very idea of the modern state (which Schmitt himself displays). One such framework that is particularly influential in



contemporary IR is ontological security theory. The ontological security argument is in a way similar to Mouffe's interpretation of Schmitt, but much broader. It is not just about political unity, which is contingent, unstable and requires permanent maintenance, but also about uncertainty as the prevailing condition of human existence. This basic fact has been posited as fundamental for an individual identity by Anthony Giddens (1991), in whose view, as summarised by Jennifer Mitzen (2006: 346), 'all social actors intrinsically know that behind the routines of daily life, "chaos lurks"'. However, humans are capable of overcoming uncertainty by establishing routines, which provide 'confident expectations, even if probabilistic, about the means-ends relationships that govern [the individual's] social life' (2006: 345). In the final analysis, ontological security requires a stable relational identity – a sense of continuous selfhood that is a necessary precondition for any social action.

Mitzen's ontological security theory is rooted in individualist ontology, but as she argues, it is probably safe to assume that similar mechanisms work at the state level (Mitzen 2006: 351–3). The problem that immediately comes up here is the methodological transition from the individual to state level: are states haunted by uncertainty to the same degree as individuals? An earlier, more discourse-oriented conceptualisation of ontological security by Jeff Huysmans (1998) could offer a better way of bridging the individual and state levels. Huysmans opposes ontological security against daily security – a routine management of friend–enemy relations in which identities of friend and foe are known and stable. Ontological security, in an explicit move of distancing from Giddens, 'concerns the general question of the political – how to order social relations while simultaneously guaranteeing the very activity of ordering itself' (Huysmans 1998: 242).

Huysmans's approach is obviously more case oriented and hardly suitable for comparisons or generalisations, except at the most abstract level. Mitzen, on the contrary, sees the pursuit of ontological security as a basic need. While she admits that such a framework cannot explain variation, in her view it can account for the persistence of conflict in situations where enmity 'comes to fulfil identity needs' (2006: 343). Brent Steele's work occupies the middle ground: on the one hand, he is in agreement with Mitzen that it must be possible to apply anthropomorphising metaphors to states, because, as individuals, they also seek 'to maintain consistent self-concepts', and their selfhood 'is constituted and maintained through a narrative which gives life to routinized foreign policy actions' (2008b: 2–3). On the other hand, Steele's ontology includes strong emphasis on emotions, while the method he uses for

his empirical studies is discourse analysis, which suggests less orientation towards variables and comparison and more attention to individual cases.

Either way, it might make sense to apply some version of ontological security theory to the Russian case in order to explain the behavioural patterns that otherwise appear inconsistent or outright irrational. A description of the othering of the West by Russia as originating in the latter's desire to overcome ontological insecurity, *inter alia*, can account for the repeated patterns of falling back on the conflictual routines, especially at times of crisis like the one Russia experienced in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the value added of employing this conceptual framework is considerably lower in dealing with two other nagging questions: the first is about why ontological insecurity repeatedly results in nothing else but anti-Western othering; the second concerns the reasons for the repeated cycles of pro-Western modernisation that inevitably follow anti-Western reaction through the duration of Russia's modern history.

Both problems could be treated through the prism of ontological security as a universal human need, but, given that we are dealing with a rather specific structural setting (hierarchical dynamics of inclusion and exclusion), it would have to borrow supporting arguments from other perspectives. In other words, there is still no satisfactory answer to the most pressing question of the social construction of the underside of international society *qua* underside, with all the contradictory dynamics that it generates.

### **The construction of the underside: Psychological, or discursive and hegemonic?**

Empirical applications of ontological security theory in IR, especially if they aim to achieve generalisation beyond an individual case, would need to come up with a model describing how societies end up being ontologically insecure. Zarakol (2010) suggests that in order to achieve this, one would need to more clearly define spatial and temporal dimensions of the phenomenon in question. By adding a spatial boundary between the West and the non-West, and by looking at how outsiders tried to socialise into West-dominated international society as a process extended in time, one can significantly enhance our understanding of how ontological insecurity can arise.

As the previous discussion reveals, the most difficult issue is the ontological status of the boundary itself and what happens when one tries

to cross it. I have already established that concentrating on 'cultural' difference would be a step backwards rather than forward in dealing with this question. Zarakol (2010, 2011) uses the concept of stigma to address the plight of the latecomers to European international society and explicitly grounds it in social psychology (in particular, in the work of Norbert Elias). Stigmatisation was an inevitable side effect of having to socialise into a pre-established normative order and internalise the norms on which it was based. Stigma accounts for both the persistence of othering in the relations between the core and the marginal actors and the repeated cycles of identification and alienation between them. In Steele's research, honour (and shame as its opposite) is the key concept through which ontological security finds its expression in political discourse, even though he also speaks about the sense of morality as playing the same role (2008b: 76–93). Even Mitzen, though she tries to be consistent in grounding the concept of ontological security in cognitive rather than psychological properties of humans, finds it hard to avoid psychological connotations. This becomes particularly visible as one deals with the opposites of ontological security – such concepts as existential anxiety, trauma and terror (Mitzen 2006: 347–9).

The first problem all of these approaches inevitably face is anthropomorphisation of the state, which is an almost inevitable side effect of relying on social psychology. It is most obvious in Zarakol's book, which builds on the rather bold supposition that 'stigma has the same effect on states that it has on individuals' (2011: 4). This is a very radical claim, even if one accepts Wendt's (2004) point that state personhood is necessary to think about the international. It inevitably leads to anthropomorphic metaphors being taken too literally in the subsequent analysis. As Charlotte Epstein points out in her critique of Wendt, this approach commits 'a classic fallacy of composition' – 'the assumption that if it works for the parts, namely, for the individual, then it must work for the whole, or states, too . . . Yet that the individual possesses a self does not logically entail that the state possesses one too' (2011: 339). In her view, 'the assumption that individual interactions will explain what states do rests on little more than a leap of faith', which results in 'ontological overreach' (2011: 341).

Apart from being theoretically and methodologically problematic, such a predisposition towards psychological explanations limits the explanatory power of the whole framework. While having to adjust to the Eurocentric hegemonic order is indeed a central fact of modern Russian history, subsuming the entire gamut of responses under the conceptual umbrella of 'stigma' is hardly a step forward. 'Once a stigma

is internalized, there is no escape from it; all subsequent actions are a product of this original condition', Zarakol (2011: 96) claims. Yet, in her empirical analysis she does have to turn to other factors, such as economic conditions and social structures, as well as particular discursive articulations, in order to explain the choice between different strategies. This is at odds with repeated attempts to emphasise stigma as the key explanation.

A similar problem is faced by Clunan in her study, which is specifically focused on Russian national identity. Clunan positions her 'aspirational constructivist' approach as an alternative to structural theories, which in her view 'contain no account of how particular identities come to dominate at different points in time and how they change' (2009: 7). However, her model of national identity formation through the prism of 'self-esteem' might be going too far in opposing structuralism. It allows for too much rational agency on the part of the elites: 'History provides aspirations and a measure against which human agents judge present-day self-images... Actors are able to learn and alter their understanding of reality and their identity by testing the correspondence between what is historically desirable and what is realistic' (2009: 13–14). Identity formation is thus presented as a product of rational – indeed, nearly scientific – choice, and it is not surprising therefore that in Clunan's view it results in *one* of the 'national self-images' becoming '*the* national identity' (2009: 14, emphasis added). This model ignores ample empirical evidence that any political discourse exists in its own frame of reference, and thus even when there is a degree of consensus about certain nodal points defining a nation's identity (such as Russia being a great power), these signifiers are usually empty and mean different things to different social agents. 'Testing' of various self-images happens not in a neutral territory, but within particular discourses, and therefore '*contesting*' is certainly a better term to describe the process.

As both of these examples illustrate, opting for psychological perspective in IR immediately invites the question of how individual emotions relate to intersubjectively held meanings and how all of that translates into political action. One potential solution is to present the effects of certain psychological phenomena as universal and therefore automatically generalisable. This is close to what Zarakol (2011) says in the theoretical part of her book: stigma affects all those who socialise late, and it does so essentially in the same way. As a concrete empirical claim, this then begs a question as to why stigmatisation would persist in some cases, while being clearly outweighed by both psychological

and utilitarian benefits of belonging to a group under different circumstances (cf. Flockart 2006). A more general problem with this approach, however, is that it 'tends to evacuate the role of meaning', leading to a mechanistic understanding of social reality that 'reads more like a series of buttons mechanically pushed in a sequence of the sort' (Epstein 2011: 340).

Alternatively, one could try to provide 'thick' qualitative descriptions of individual cases of emotionally driven behaviour. This entails the risk of imposing one's own interpretation of the situation on a world of meaning, which is different from one's own – this, in my view, is what happens in Dominique Moïsi's study of the impact of emotions on world politics (2009). The only method rigorous enough to avoid this trap and to enable the researcher to reconstruct the meaning hermeneutically, from within the particular historical context, is discourse analysis. This is the main toolkit used by Steele, and this might be what makes his book a point of reference for empirical research on ontological security. Discourse analysis helps to avoid anthropomorphisation and the need to translate emotions from the individual to state level. Instead, honour, shame and moral obligation are interpreted as discursive nodal points, which are indispensable for maintaining a consistent self-identity (Steele 2008b). This becomes particularly important because the self-identity is constantly questioned by both domestic and international actors pursuing all sorts of discursive strategies (Steele 2008a). In this manner, the pursuit of ontological security can drive the state into a course of action, which might be considered irrational or even outright detrimental to physical survival and material gain.

In the field of Russian foreign policy studies, a similar approach (although not focused on ontological security) is exemplified by Tsygankov's book on Russia's relations with the West. He defines the key concept of honour contextually, and thus it can include any elements that a historically existing human collectivity might consider ethically commendable. Encounters with the outside world can generate either 'positive emotions of hope or camaraderie, strengthening those aspects of honour that favour international cooperation', or they may 'bring to life emotions of fear, resentment, anger, and righteousness, leading to a more nationalistic and exclusive definition of honour that frequently underlies competitive and conflictual behaviour' (2012b: 23). Consequently, Tsygankov identifies three recurrent patterns of Russia's relations with the West: cooperation, defensiveness and assertiveness.

The undisputable advantages of conceptualising psychological metaphors as nodal points existing in a particular discursive space have

a flipside due to the problem I have already repeatedly mentioned – the limited generalisability of context-specific findings. As soon as one grounds metaphors in discourse, one can no longer operationalise them as independent variables and thus use as the basis for cross-country comparison. While ‘honour’ could be used to make sense of the foreign policies of both Belgium (Steele 2008b: 94–113) and Russia (Tsygankov 2012b), its meaning in these two cases would be substantially different. Thus, we cannot say that the policies of two countries were driven by honour in the same way as we might present certain action or lack thereof as resulting from, say, the quest for new markets. Grounding one’s concepts in the concrete reality of discourse is a very sound methodological move, but one must be aware of the fact that it makes drawing parallels between different historical experiences a qualitatively different exercise. While still possible, it must be based on a meticulous qualitative and genealogical analysis of how meaning evolves, diverges, converges and crosses discursive boundaries. If one were to conduct such a deep comparative study of Belgium and Russia, there would be good chances to discover vast differences in the meaning of ‘honour’, to the point that one would have to conclude that the use of the same word in the discourse did not in itself indicate similarity between the two cases. To contrast this with the postcolonial vocabulary, one could argue that postcolonial hybridity is at work in both cases, even though its effects would be very dissimilar. These differences can be accounted for by referring to the unlike positions of the two nations in the hegemonically organised international society and their respective colonial experience. Moreover, I would bet that one would be able to see the effects of hybridity on the meaning of ‘honour’ in both cases – the *unlike* effect of the *same* force on two units *differently positioned* within the hegemonic structure.

Another question is the analytical value added of introducing honour and other psychological metaphors in relation to the existing constructivist and poststructuralist theories based on the concept of identity. In particular, Lene Hansen’s (2006) model of identity construction is certainly capable of accounting for all aspects of state behaviour dealt with by Tsygankov’s theory of honour, while putting them in a much more comprehensive and economical conceptual framework. In Hansen’s terms, honour would come as part of the ethical dimension of identity construction, which is then inextricably linked with the spatial dimension (this includes relations with the international environment) and the temporal one (conspicuously lacking in Tsygankov’s analysis). Tsygankov’s positive and negative emotions stirred by an encounter

with the Other would be reconceptualised as linking or differentiation (here, Hansen builds on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) theory of discourse as establishing relations of equivalence and difference between individual signifiers). It would seem, therefore, that 'psychologising' discourse analysis violates the principle of parsimony: while viewing political action as embedded in discourse implies dealing with (socially constructed) meaning, psychological approaches have to add emotion as an extra ontological layer.

In Zarakol's latest article (2014), as well as in Rebecca Adler-Nissen's (2014) text, stigma is re-conceptualised in clearer sociological and discursive terms, as resulting from the social construction of norm and deviance. This move could solve the problem of anthropomorphisation, while at the same time maintaining the level of generality sufficient for comparative studies. Of particular value here is the description of a mechanism that produces an internal split in the stigmatised subject: 'Stigmatisation is the internalisation of a particular normative standard that defines one's own attributes as undesirable' (Zarakol 2014: 314). This, however, still implies the need of foregrounding concrete experiences: unless one engages in a detailed inductive analysis of how the 'attributes' of the stigmatised identity are constructed, there is a danger of essentialising those. Besides, it remains unclear what makes the peripheral actors internalise the hegemonic norm, given the painful effects of stigmatisation. This points in the direction of analysing power and inequality and thus moving beyond stigmatisation. Indeed, even though Adler-Nissen (2014: 152) admits that, stigmatisation 'involves an asymmetric power relationship', her research offers no consistent account of how this power works.

In a somewhat similar vein, while acknowledging the contribution by postcolonial theory, feminism and world-systems theory to the critique of Eurocentrism, Tsygankov sees the value of this contribution mostly in establishing the fact that 'in cross-cultural interactions the self and the other are different but morally equal', and thus 'no matter how much the other may be willing to promote its vision of "virtue" and "good" to the outside world, the self is unlikely to fully accept a vision that undermines its own system of cultural meanings' (2012b: 21–2). Such a view certainly fits Tsygankov's own understanding of honour as defined, in the final analysis, by a domestic 'honour-based coalition', while interaction with the outsiders does no more than 'influence' this process (Tsygankov 2012b: 23–4). This suggests a level discursive field, whereas in reality, as highlighted by Zarakol, the nodal points of the debate in non-core countries are to a large extent externally defined.

The crux of the matter seems to lie in the fact that in the current global normative order, the West is in control of the key points of reference of the global political discourse. Other players do challenge Western 'unilateralism', but can neither redefine these nodal points nor introduce their own (Morozov 2013). If this is indeed the bottom line, then the only concept that can provide a crucial missing link between the general phenomena (stigmatisation, othering, ontological insecurity of the outsiders) and the specific circumstances of individual cases is the concept of hegemony.

It needs to be made clear at the outset that the understanding of hegemony employed in this book is significantly different from that in mainstream IR. In the latter context, the concept of hegemony was developed to account for the unequal distribution of power among states and evolved from the realist understanding, centred on coercion (Gilpin 1981, 1987, Mearsheimer 2001), towards a more complex neo-Gramscian reading, which usually goes by the name of critical theory. It amalgamates material power (with the emphasis on economics and the power of capital) and the power of ideas and institutions (Cox 1987, Robinson 2004). Key to the Gramscian interpretation of hegemony is the idea of universalisation of a particular socio-economic and normative order in a historical bloc, establishing

not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating a hegemony of a fundamental social group over subordinate groups.

(Gramsci 1971: 181–2, quoted in  
Morton 2007: 94)

Critical theory of IR remains, however, a third-image theory, tuned to the systemic level and describing the world as governed by *one* hegemonic order, determined by the relations of production and forms of state (Cox 1987, Morton 2007: 111–36). Local cases are relevant in this framework only in as much as they can be interpreted as manifestations of the global capitalist logic. Hopf's (2013) study discussed above is an important exception, but it treats the Russian case as an isolated instance of resistance to neo-liberal hegemony, while the exact nature and origins of Russian anti-neo-liberal common sense remain obscure.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the postcolonial understanding of hegemony also dates back to Gramsci, but it is substantially different



in two important respects. On the one hand, the postcolonial definition is narrower, since it distinguishes between hegemony and domination. In a hegemonic situation, the existence of the subaltern as part of the popular is acknowledged, and her interests are politically and discursively represented – albeit in a limited and distorted form. The subaltern thus has a stake in the hegemonic order and partially identifies with it, accepting it as legitimate, but at the same time resists it, sometimes openly, but more often by engaging in various subversive practices.

On the other hand, postcolonialism views hegemony as omnipresent and multilayered; in this sense, it is a definition that is much broader than that of mainstream IR. In further developing this interpretation, postcolonialism could more consistently draw on the poststructuralist theory of hegemony, where this concept is provided with a firm anchoring in structural linguistics and Derridean deconstruction (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Torfing 1999). Potentially at least, the entire world can be seen through the poststructuralist lens as structured by multiple hegemonies existing at all levels of human interaction. Thus, a country that occupies a subaltern position within the hegemonic global order would itself internally be organised as a hegemonic structure distinct from, but conditioned by, global hegemony. A counter-hegemonic political movement, if it is to muster up enough support, needs to acquire hegemony within a particular social group, presumably disempowered by the more universal hegemonic order. Even the most marginal local community would probably feature some sort of hegemony, legitimating internal inequalities and the authority of the indigenous elites.

Another important distinction between the approaches of mainstream IR and poststructuralism/postcolonialism concerns the role of counter-hegemonic resistance. Critical IR theory sees hegemony as based on ‘a consensual acceptance of socioeconomic and political hierarchy’, as well as on ‘the articulation and justification of what are particular and class-ridden socioeconomic interests as general and universal interests, whereby rule-guided behaviour . . . is not imposed by the hegemon but, instead, develops out of the acceptance and internalization of such patterns of behaviour’ (Saul 2012: 328). Any resistance, even if it has the material basis in the hegemonic order, is external to the logic of hegemony as such. It is a manifestation of the agency of ‘subaltern classes’, whose interests are distinct from the hegemonic groups and, in the final analysis, transparent to both the group itself and to the outside observer (Morton 2007: 171–200).

Postcolonialism and poststructuralism, contrariwise, see any social order in its entirety, including its discursive aspects, as dislocated and

hybrid, and the shared identity between the hegemon and the subaltern as only partial and always subject to challenge. Counter-hegemonic struggle is therefore an essential part of hegemony as such. It is for this reason that Chakrabarty's project of 'provincialising Europe' includes, as an essential component, demonstrating the extent to which anti-colonial nationalism was and remains trapped in the Eurocentric mode of thinking. In the final analysis, European thought can become aware of its own provincialism by trying to directly engage with subaltern pasts, which in Chakrabarty's analysis play the role of a Derridean supplement. These 'exotic' pasts both enable Eurocentric historicising by serving as a constitutive outside for modernity and show the limits of history as a discipline: 'What gives us a point of entry into the times of gods and spirits – times that are seemingly very different from the empty, secular, and homogenous time of history – is that they are never completely alien; we inhabit them to begin with' (2000: 113). In other words, this is a holistic view of hegemonic order, where all identities are hybridised by the colonial encounter and yet sufficiently distinct to enable us to see inequality inherent in the hegemonic relationship.

In light of the postcolonial understanding of hegemony, Russia's condition comes out as similar to that of many other latecomers to the Eurocentric international society and distinct enough from other groups of states that constitute this society today. It is a hybrid identity in the sense that it has been shaped by multi-vectorised colonial encounters. It is a subaltern identity, which has internalised a certain normative order whose nodal points continue to be externally defined. It is also an imperial identity, which takes pride in 'civilising' its own periphery – that is, in promoting the same hegemonic order among the native cultures, which occupy subaltern positions vis-à-vis the Russian imperial centre. It is a conflict between the roles of a colonial Master and a colonised native, with both roles deeply imprinted on Russia's identity, that produces what can be described as 'stigma' or 'ontological insecurity', so characteristic of the Russian being in the world. To account for this situation, psychologising metaphors might still be handy for stylistic and expressive reasons, but they do not play any essential role in my conceptual apparatus. I can easily apply Occam's razor to cut off the stylistic redundancies and to remain with a relatively light-weight toolkit, which nevertheless is a product of a rather profound critical rethinking of modernity.

I still need to do some conceptual work, however, in order to be able to fully account for the structural factors behind Russia's subalternity.

I have already pointed out in the previous chapter that in materialist terms, Russia's peripheral position originates in the capitalist logic of uneven and combined development. Integrating this logic in the postcolonial perspective is a move that requires some theoretical reflection, supported by the empirical evidence. I embark on this task in Chapter 3.

# 3

## Material Dependency: Postcolonialism, Development and Russia's 'Backwardness'

The central theme of this chapter concerns Russia's material dependence on the global capitalist core. I argue that the best way of dealing with this condition is to view it as an effect of the uneven and combined development of global capitalism. I also rely on the existing studies to demonstrate that a material dimension can and must be integrated into the postcolonial perspective and that the concept of uneven and combined development can enhance our understanding of subalternity. At the same time, I view the material and the ideational not as ontologically separate layers of reality, but rather as analytical constructs that we use to make sense of the social world. Consequently, while providing a historical retrospective of Russia's integration into capitalist modernity, I focus on both of these aspects and, first of all, on their mutual conditioning.

A typical representation of the Russian economy in popular as well as academic literature features distinctively Orientalist themes. A gloomy picture drawn by Mikhail Khodorkovsky in one of his last letters from prison, two months before his release, summarises this image very well. According to the former oligarch, the country is plagued by

state monopolism, corruption and inefficient administration, a consequence of the implacability of power and its excessive centralization in the hands of a single executive.

Many talented people are leaving the country; more than 2 million Russians have gone in just 10 years. The capital flight that started in 2008 stands at \$350 billion and counting. Three million entrepreneurs have been subjected to criminal prosecution, and some

of them, like Sergei L. Magnitsky and Vasily G. Aleksanyan, have died as a result of being in prison.

This is the reason why there is so little innovation in Russia, and why dependence on raw materials prices is rising while the overall growth rate is slowing. The quality of education is decreasing, while industry is falling technologically further behind the West, and now even China.

(Khodorkovsky 2013)

As any Orientalist discourse, it imagines the country as not just barbarian but also exotic. Russia is a country of opportunities, where the adventurous and the lucky get rich very quickly. Those who are less fortunate lose their wealth, and sometimes their lives. In their struggle with corrupt authorities and organised crime, they are sometimes helped by noble savages from among the locals. The cream of the cream of the latter are civilised enough to speak English (most do so with a funny accent, which only makes it more authentic), and thus are capable of providing first-hand accounts of the terrible conditions in their home country.

The Orientalist odour of this narrative is strong enough to cause protestations on the part of any postcolonially minded scholar. Unexpected as it may sound, I am not going to contest Orientalist descriptions of the Russian economic and social structure, because I believe them to be largely true. There is no 'other story' when it comes to Russia: the only story to tell is the story of uneven and combined development, which made Russia into a periphery of capitalist civilisation. My deconstruction of this narrative will therefore be much subtler: instead of confronting it head-on, I will rather show how Russia's backwardness still proves that postcolonial critique is valid in a wider global context. In some respects, this requires pushing the envelope and revisiting some of the background assumptions of the postcolonial approach. The fact that the Russian case forces us to do this is, in my view, an indication that this case needs to be given much more attention by postcolonial scholars than is currently the case.

This chapter opens with a brief presentation of the most important data illustrating Russia's dependent, semi-peripheral position in global capitalist modernity. For students of Russia, this story is familiar, but it provides an important background for the reader less familiar with the Russian realities. The next step needed to make sense of the Russian case from the perspective of postcolonial theory is

to address the status of economic issues in the theory itself. Having originated in literary and cultural studies, postcolonial theory has only recently attempted to develop a systematic understanding of economics. This has been achieved through a debate with dependency theory and its contemporary heirs, most of which belong to the broadly defined Marxist tradition. This literature review enables me to spell out my understanding of how to address the duality of material and ideational in a theoretical framework which, in principle, is premised on ontological monism. The other key question that is highlighted by these discussions is whether it is legitimate to raise the issue of 'underdevelopment' and 'dependency' from a non-Eurocentric perspective. This question acquires a paradoxical twist when applied to Russia, and it will remain in the backdrop for the rest of the chapter.

My key argument will be that Russia is an integral, but different, part of Western capitalist modernity, and therefore in this case the use of concepts such as dependency, peripherality and uneven and combined development is fully legitimate. It does not exclude viewing Russia as an empire, but, as distinct from the vast literature on Russian 'hydrocarbon imperialism', the conceptual tools employed in this study reveal the subaltern character of this phenomenon. Ever since the end of Mongol rule, the Russian state has been sovereign and independent, while at the same time functioning as a key institution promoting Russia's peripheral development and, consequently, self-colonisation. In addition, the Eurocentric mindset has been inscribed into national narratives, which made Russia a true subaltern – not just marginalised, but also speechless, being spoken for by the representatives of the core (including, for that matter, the native elites).

To demonstrate this, I provide a brief retrospective analysis of how uneven and combined development produced the peculiar model of Russian peripheral modernisation. My argument is that modern Russia, as a state and as a self-conscious nation, fully internalised the Eurocentric normative order. All potential alternatives to Eurocentric capitalist development have been eliminated: they might still remain out there as totally dominated and excluded local orders, but there is no place for them on the discursive horizon of Russian society. However, Russia has not assimilated into the Western hegemonic order: there is still a tangible difference marked along both political and cultural lines, which continues to determine the identity dynamics between Russia and the West, generating insecurities and conflict on a broad range of issues.

## **Russia's economic dependency and the critique of Eurocentrism**

In her introductory volume on the political economy of development, Ankie Hoogvelt (2001: 29–30) summarises the economic nature of neocolonialism and dependency in the following way:

The imposition of the international division of labour under formal colonialism had the indirect effect of laying the foundations for continued economic control and domination over colonial resources even in the absence of direct political overlordship and administration... [O]nce the most important productive sectors of the colonial countries had been 'slotted' into the system of world capitalism and its institutions, control over these economic resources could be relied on to continue at 'arm's length', even without direct political suzerainty.

It seems, however, that political suzerainty as such is not a necessary condition for a country to be 'slotted' into a peripheral position in the capitalist world economy. Rather, the defining factor is the conditions of entry into the system of the international division of labour. Russia, with its specialisation in fur, timber, agricultural products and, later, oil and gas, had to 'exchange commodities produced in conditions of a higher productivity of labour against commodities produced in conditions of a lower productivity of labour'. As such, it was an unequal relationship: 'an exchange of less against more labour, which inevitably led to a *drain*, an outward flow of capital... to the advantage of Western Europe' (Mandel 1978: 53).

Even though Ernest Mandel (1978: 54–5) points out that this initial disparity did not prevent Russia (along with such countries as Japan and Spain) from successfully moving to the indigenous accumulation of capital, in the final analysis it could not break away from the pattern of dependent development. As the twentieth century drew to an end, it became apparent that the Soviet Union, and later the Russian Federation, remained locked in this unequal exchange model. This concerns, in particular, what Mandel describes as 'technological rents', which have become the main source of surplus profits in late capitalism. They are

derived from a monopolization of technical progress – i.e., from discoveries and inventions which lower the cost-price of commodities but cannot (at least in the medium-run) become generalized

throughout a given branch or production and applied by all competitors, because of the structure of monopoly capital itself.

(Mandel 1978: 192)

Generally speaking, technological rent takes the form of Russia exporting low-tech commodities, mostly raw materials, and importing high value added goods whose production requires technological sophistication.

Russia's relations with the European Union (EU) probably best illustrate the country's peripheral position in the global economy, which reveals many features typical for postcolonial settings. The whole structure of the relationship is obviously asymmetrical: in 2013, 77.8 per cent of the EU's imports from Russia consisted of mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials, whereas exports were dominated by machinery and transport equipment (47.3 per cent, see European Commission 2014: 3). In other words, Russia sells mostly raw materials and buys high value added goods – a trade structure typical for a relationship between the industrialised centre and the underdeveloped periphery.

What is worse, a similar pattern is now developing in its trade with China, with mineral fuels comprising 70.7 per cent of Russia's exports in 2013, while 49.6 per cent of imports consisted of machinery and equipment (Vedomosti 2014, see also Rautava 2011). Attempts to establish cooperation with China in the high-tech sphere, undertaken during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, did not bring any tangible results: all major bilateral projects remain focused on energy and boil down to China providing loans in exchange for oil and gas supplies (Gabuev and Melnikov 2013). Unlike the EU, China runs a constant surplus in its trade with Russia (US\$17.58 billion in 2013, or nearly one-fifth of the turnover). If and when the gas contracted by the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation in the recent major deal with Gazprom comes to China, it will decrease Russia's trade deficit, but increase the share of fuel in the exports (Vedomosti 2014). In sum, when it comes to the material aspects, it makes more sense to speak about Russia's unequal, peripheral position vis-à-vis the global capitalist core, which today includes most of East Asia, rather than just a sole dependency on the West.

Russia's economic dependence on oil and gas exports has been growing throughout the post-Soviet period and in particular during the period of prosperity popularly associated with Vladimir Putin's leadership. Oil and gas exports provide about two-thirds of the total export revenues and almost half of federal budget revenues (Gaddy and Ickes 2013b: 310). Spending on research and development as a percentage of



GDP contracted during the 1990s and never reverted back to Soviet levels; moreover, the trend since 2003 is negative (Makarov and Varshavsky 2013, Petrova 2013). Only 13 per cent of Russian firms engage in innovation, compared to 28 per cent of Polish and 75 per cent of Brazilian companies (OECD 2014: 129). While Russia's share of worldwide natural gas exports amounts to 15 per cent (CIA 2013), in the high-tech sector it is only 0.2 per cent (Strategiya 2012: 76).

With oil and gas being the primary sector through which Russia is 'slotted' within the global capitalist economy, its economic dependency is in effect much more comprehensive. Much of the added value associated with the oil and gas industries, especially in the technologically advanced sectors, is generated abroad. The Russian steel industry is in principle capable of satisfying the oil and gas sector demand for large-diameter pipes and drill pipes, but without protectionist measures would lose the markets to competitors from Ukraine and, more recently, China (Kommersant 2013a). In more technologically advanced sectors, the situation is even worse: for example, 85 per cent of xanthan – a microbiologically produced polysaccharide needed to maximise the extraction of oil from reservoirs – comes from abroad (German 2012: 53). As the recent debate around EU and US sanctions against Russia for its role in the Ukrainian conflict has revealed, the Russian energy sector lacks advanced technologies for offshore drilling, which jeopardises some of the major new developments planned for the next years (Serov 2014).

The arms trade is usually hailed as the only hi-tech area where Russia remains globally competitive. There is no denying that the Russian military-industrial complex does possess some crucial know-how, which enables it to keep and expand the markets (Rosefielde 2013). At the same time, one does not have to dig too deep in the official sources to discover gaping holes in its technological capacity. A special set of measures, aimed at achieving, in the long run, technological independence of the Russian defence industries from imported components, was designed in 2013. Essentially, it amounted to a prohibition of the use of imported goods and services in any defence- and security-related procurement. However, the government decree establishing the ban (Pravitelstvo 2013) had to be supplemented by a long list of equipment – from casting machines to water-jet cutting machines and measuring equipment – which are exempt from the ban because these are not produced in Russia (Gorenburg 2013).

Dependency on imports is particularly acute in telecommunications: over 90 per cent of all currently installed telecommunication equipment has been imported (Balashova 2014). Conversely, information

technology and telecommunication equipment comprises less than 1 per cent of Russian exports (Hopf 2013: 328). Attempts by Duma deputies to ban the use of imported components whenever a Russian analogue is available have been described by experts as unrealistic and potentially destructive (Balashova 2014).

The low quality of institutions is often cited as the main reason for Russia's continued dependence on commodity exports. Thus, repeated attempts to stimulate exports of processed wood products by imposing export duties on round timber have largely failed: Russia remains a net exporter of timber and an importer of woodwork. Among other things, this has a severe environmental impact: the amount of illegal logging is estimated as close to one-third of total volume and exceeding the official data by four times when it comes to valuable tree species. The illegally logged wood is then exported using various corrupt cover-up schemes (Shapovalov 2013).

The fact that in 2002 Russia became, for the first time since the 1980s, a net exporter of grain, is customarily celebrated as demonstrating 'that we have made progress, a significant one, in agriculture' (Putin 2012b). These reports, however, need to be evaluated in the historical context: grain exports were the key element of Russia's integration, as a peripheral country, into the capitalist world economy, and even today expose the Russian economy to the volatility of global markets (Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013, especially 222–51, 418–19). Furthermore, the exports of grain and other primary agricultural products are increasing to a large extent due to the lack of capacity to process those into treacles, syrups, forage proteins and essential amino acids, vitamins, medicines, ferments and other items. The food industry has traditionally been considered strong on the domestic Russian market, but it is dependent on additives (ferments, thickeners, colouring agents, stabilisers, preservatives, etc.), most of which are imported. Characteristically, China is the biggest supplier (German 2012: 55). Besides, the sharp decrease in grain imports during the 1990s was compensated by rapidly growing imports of meat: thus, the change of the external trade pattern was caused by the decline in domestic livestock farming rather than by any increase in the productivity of the grain sector (AgroFakt 2005). Even though these negative trends have been to some extent reversed in recent years, in the foreseeable future it is unlikely that export earnings in the agricultural sector are going to compensate for the costs of imports (Wegren 2013).

Apart from economics proper, Russia's semi-peripheral position is evident in such areas as the ranking of its universities, the direction of international student flows, and the number of international meetings

(Hopf 2013: 329–32). Its leading research centres in such internationally competitive fields as mathematics, physics, biology and chemistry are affected by brain drain, while other sectors, in particular humanities and social sciences, exist largely in isolation from the global intellectual exchange (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia 2012). According to Alexander Etkind (2014: 161–2), the resource economy might also cause deterioration of human capital and rising gender inequality.

It must be admitted that some of the causal claims listed above rely on relatively thin evidence, suggesting the need to control for alternative explanations. The same concern could also be raised on a larger scale: is technological rent a sufficient criterion to diagnose economic dependency? Even if the latter exists, is it a sufficient ground to speak about Russia's marginalisation and even subalternity? My answer is that neither claim holds in abstract terms; given the degree of complexity inherent in such notions as dependency and subalternity, their presence can only be established in a specific historical context. I do believe that contemporary Russia is a dependent and subaltern country, but it comes as little surprise that there is no general consensus on this point.

In the academic literature, there are diverging views on whether reliance on hydrocarbon and other raw material exports is indeed a curse (Ellman 2006, Treisman 2010, Gel'man and Marganiia 2012, Ross 2012). The prevailing view seems to be that natural wealth can be a source of development in the presence of properly functioning institutions (Jones Luong and Weinthal 2010), although structural problems inherited from the Soviet economy might be more serious than just improper management (Gaddy and Ickes 2013a). In the Russian debate, exposing the country's dependency on the global capitalist core used to be a pastime of left-leaning economists and sociologists whose thinking had been informed by Soviet political economy and often influenced by world-systems theory (e.g. Deliagin 2000, Kordonsky 2007, Kagarlitsky 2008, Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013, see also Tsygankov 2012a: 210–13). Towards the end of the previous decade, however, the overwhelming consensus in the Russian public sphere consolidated around the idea that the hydrocarbon economy is the primary source of many social evils. Voices asserting that Russia's economy is competitive enough and export dependence does not go beyond the limits of what is normal in the globalized world (e.g. Gosh100 2014) do exist, but hardly rule the mainstream.

The recognition of Russia's subaltern position spans almost the entire political spectrum: an independent political scientist claims that 'Russia is increasingly becoming a third world country' (Belkovsky in Echo

Moskvy 2013b); an oppositional blogger calls Russia 'a Kuwaitised country' and a 'banana republic' (Solonin 2014); nationalist economists deplore the deindustrialisation of the country, finding that 'we produce nothing and are inexorably sliding down into the category of third-rate countries' (Gurova and Ivanter 2012). It is indicative that describing Russia's situation, and in particular its trade pattern, as 'colonial' or 'dependent' (with or without quotation marks) has become a commonsensical rhetorical device that does not need any explication or substantiation (e.g. Bordachev and Romanova 2013: 82).

The position expressed on behalf of various government agencies is slightly more ambiguous. The 'energy superpower' orthodoxy, which defined the Russian leadership's approach to macroeconomic management during the first two terms of Putin's presidency (Rutland 2008),<sup>1</sup> is somewhat out of fashion. The Kremlin still does its best to present the existing system of economic governance as capable of investing the resource rent for the benefit of the current and future generations of the Russian people; it also emphasises 'diversification of exports' (e.g. Putin 2014b), in particular in the context of 'pivoting to Asia' and the May 2014 large-scale gas deal with China (Koch-Weiser and Murray 2014). The key declared goal, nonetheless, is diversification of the economy as a whole by developing, 'alongside a modern fuel and energy industry, other competitive sectors' (Putin 2012e). The risks of relying too much on raw material exports are emphasised not just by the neo-liberals in Medvedev's cabinet, like the Minister of Economic Development Aleksei Uliukaev (2013) or the First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov (Vedomosti 2013b), but also by such hardliners as Putin's economic advisor Sergei Glazyev (2013, 2014). To some extent, it confirms Hopf's (2013) assertion that the elites are trying to integrate Russia into the neo-liberal world, although Glazyev's vision of a great leap forward to be achieved by walling off the national economy is probably too extreme to fit this description.

A further complication is added by the unquestionable fact that the calls for the diversification of production by means of using the rents to stimulate technological development in manufacturing quite often are no more than just claims 'for a share of rents' (Gaddy and Ickes 2013b: 333). Regardless of the motivation of individual speakers, under the structural conditions of the rent-based economy, any attempt to divert the resource rent to support other sectors is likely to lead to an even greater dependence on resource income (Gaddy and Ickes 2013a). It also tends to strengthen the state's dominant position as an economic actor, since large corporations need to be pushed towards generating

more added value inside the country, which means that their business logic is influenced by state intervention. In the opinion of the Duma deputy Valery Zubov (2014), such measures point in the direction of the politicisation of the economy, rather than using state apparatus to promote economic diversification.

In the meantime, there is a much broader issue that becomes salient as soon as postcolonial theory is brought into the picture: it is almost inevitable that any critique of the hydrocarbon economy is framed in Eurocentric terms. It takes the reality of the 'developed countries' as the norm and treats Russia as a deviation. Keeping this in mind, one probably has to ask whether the 'oil lobby' could be right. Can it happen that the Russian model is fully viable, while its criticism is no more than a manifestation of Western Orientalism and self-Orientalising discourses within Russia? In this logic, the Russian economy does not have to develop in accordance with neo-liberal prescriptions. The existing model reflects the uniqueness of Russia's culture and historical experience. The task must not be to move away from the resource economy, but simply to fine-tune the existing economic system to benefit the Russian people.

This reasoning is in effect a reflection of a wider case postcolonialism makes against dependency theory, accusing it of Eurocentrism for uncritically accepting neo-liberal capitalism as a universal model. As suggested by Chapter 1, there is a tendency within a section of postcolonial writing to vindicate existing social realities in the periphery by classifying them as signs of cultural difference. Unless this argument is checked against some set of universal criteria, it inevitably leads to relativism. Local oppressors then gladly make use of such arguments in presenting their own corrupt rule as heroic resistance against Western imperialism.

In some cases, it is indeed possible to demonstrate the existence of a plausible link between local forms of cultural and economic life. Some studies show that the South Korean economic model is based on Confucian values, and this example is rightly used in postcolonial literature to question the universal validity of the neo-liberal dogma (cf. Pollard et al. 2011a: 7). However, such an argument cannot automatically apply to every other case; every time it must be supported with empirical evidence demonstrating how local values translate into institutions and practices and how this, in turn, makes the economic structure conditioned by cultural difference. There is hardly any evidence of 'the Russian model' being based on authentic local values, and hence the inability to overcome the dependence on the export of raw

materials has hampered Russia's progress in *any* conceivable system of coordinates.

On the opposite end of the debate, Etkind adamantly insists that 'the oil curse [is] a self-imposed condition, a contingent political process that depends on the unique choices of the authorities and the population' (2014: 161, see also Etkind 2011: 89–90). At the same time, however, he is keen on describing the far-reaching consequences of this phenomenon for various aspects of societal development. I see this position as somewhat self-contradictory: if one accepts that there is a certain structural logic in a particular developmental model, it makes little sense to claim that the model as such has been self-imposed, thus assuming unrestrained agency on the part of decision-makers in choosing the model, but not in staving off its negative consequences. Indeed, as I demonstrate further in this chapter, Russia's development is best understood as being governed by the global logic of uneven and combined development. This logic certainly does not eliminate agency, but it does make certain choices more difficult than others.

To repeat, this chapter does not set out to prove any abstract point: that dependency cannot be overcome by carefully organised state intervention and that there is no alternative to the neo-liberal capitalist model, or any other. My argument is rather minimalist: the current Russian way of combining a hydrocarbon economy with a strong authoritarian state cannot be presented as an alternative to Western capitalism, and therefore describing Russia's economic development as dependent is fully legitimate. There are diverging explanations as to why exactly the current model does not work, but nearly everyone agrees that it does not, in the sense of not benefiting the people and being unsustainable in the long run. Moreover, as the rest of this book demonstrates, there is no alternative normative system that could provide a point of reference for assessing Russia independently of the West. Given all of that, the Russian case remains what it is: an example of a poorly managed semi-peripheral country where the benefits of dependent development are shared among the elites, while the masses are increasingly marginalised and silenced.

### **Making sense of Russia's backwardness**

The data summarised in the previous section certainly points out the existence, at the level of material structures, of a certain substantial difference between Russia and (the rest of) Europe. In the positivist literature, reflection on this difference has been mostly conducted in

terms of 'normalcy' versus 'deviation' or 'abnormality' (Rosefielde 2005, Shleifer 2005, Shleifer and Treisman 2005, Treisman 2010). This type of questioning, in turn, is very close to the growing body of studies classifying the Russian political regime as 'hybrid' (Hale 2011) or as 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way 2010) and so on. All these approaches, however, are problematic from the point of view adopted in this book, as they assume the universality of Western models and thus their applicability to all societies without exception. Russia's difference, in turn, is almost invariably conceptualised as a deviation from a certain assumed norm, which is supposed to apply everywhere, regardless of the country's position in the global capitalist economy.

The specificity of Russia's economic structure certainly plays out in identity politics, too, although it is wrong to describe this interplay in deterministic terms, by reducing identities and discourses to superstructural epiphenomena of the economic basis. Contrary to the persistent assertions of what Jacques Rancière (1999: 82–3) terms 'metapolitical discourse', there is no genuine truth of the social that would be hidden beneath political representation. As we know from structural linguistics and especially from its contemporary poststructuralist interpretations (see, in particular, Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Torfing 1999), differences are the fabric of the social, but only few of them are elevated to privileged positions where they come to signify social boundaries. Many countries with solid European or Western credentials would display individual features similar to Russia's, but these differences would seldom, if ever, produce the dynamic of alienation whose intensity would be comparable with the Russian case.

Thus, the historically sedimented discursive structure in which Russia figures as Europe's Other certainly plays an autonomous role in perpetuating not just itself, but Russia's subaltern position in its entirety. Moreover, it is totally reasonable to suggest that at least at certain moments in European history, the alienation of Russia clearly worked on the causal side of the equation, hampering the country's social and economic development. On the whole, however, it is probably better to describe the whole setting as an overdetermined combination of mutually constitutive elements, some of which can be analytically described as 'material', the others as 'ideational'.

While keeping the overdetermination in mind, it still needs to be acknowledged that economic dependency remains the single most important factor which is not given sufficient attention in the literature discussing Russia's undecidable position in relation to Europe and the West. The reason for that is not the lack of awareness, but rather

the unavailability of the conceptual tools that would allow to integrate economic and other non-ideational factors into existing accounts of identity politics. In liberal constructivism, which subscribes to the idea of duality between the material and the ideational, the former is bracketed off by assuming that it has been given enough attention in the rationalist approaches. Since constructivism is usually defined in opposition to rationalism, its primary goal has been to demonstrate 'that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces' (Wendt 1999: 1). Hence, the emphasis on identities and norms, as distinct from material structures, became part of constructivism's own identity within the disciplinary field.

In the meantime, the other prominent reflectivist trend in Russian studies, poststructuralist discourse analysis, explicitly rejects the opposition between the material and the ideational. As Jacob Torfing (1999: 300) puts it, '[t]he notion of discourse cuts across the distinction between thought and reality, and includes both semantic and pragmatic aspects. It does not merely designate a linguistic region within the social, but is rather co-extensive with the social'. In principle, this does not exclude analysis of class structures, economic dependencies and other background conditions of the discursive field – for example, by conceptualising them as 'deeper layers of the discursive structure' (Wæver 2002). However, since the final aim is to account for the construction of political boundaries, in all their ambiguity, empirical analysis normally focuses on the discourses that explicitly articulate selfhood and otherness (e.g. Prozorov 2005, 2008, 2009c, Morozov 2008, 2009). So far, there have been no studies systematically investigating, by means of discourse analysis, the significance for Russia's position in the international system of the deeper constants, such as Russia's dependence on hydrocarbon exports, or of factors like class, gender and other social differences, whose interplay with articulations of foreign policy identity is far less straightforward.

This conclusion might sound odd, given that the origins of poststructuralist discourse analysis lie in the post-Marxist literature that specifically sets out to rethink the significance of class in post-industrial capitalist society (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Laclau 2005). It seems, however, that combining the problematic of social inequality with that of national identity requires a considerable conceptual and methodological effort, which the subfield of Russian foreign policy studies is yet to make.<sup>2</sup> As I argue throughout this book, making this effort necessarily involves a substantial engagement with postcolonial studies.



At the other end of the spectrum, neo-Marxist approaches such as dependency theory and world-systems theory have no problem including Russia as a peripheral country into their respective (and fundamentally similar) analytical frameworks. Studies focusing specifically on the Russian case are few in number (e.g. Lane 2012, Christensen 2013); most detailed and sophisticated among them are written by Russian authors and aimed at the promotion of the world-systems approach among the Russian public (see Kagarlitsky 2008, Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013). The relative scarcity is probably due to the fact that Russia, viewed from this perspective, does not immediately stand out as a particularly inspiring case. A notable exception here is the brilliant study by Georgi Derluguian (2005), which integrates various levels of analysis – world-systemic, country-level, regional and individual – to produce a ‘world-system biography’ reflecting the ‘developmental trajectory’ of the Soviet Union and to offer a convincing narrative about its collapse. What is more, Derluguian is also able to generalise back to the global level, warning that ‘the *durable social breakdown*... has already affected vast swaths of the world-system and threatens to spread further, penetrating even into the core zones’ (2005: 290).

World-systems theory thus provides a superb conceptual toolkit for analysing the material aspects of Russia’s position in the international system. There are, however, two interrelated problems with this approach, which make it less useful for the other key dimensions of my study. Firstly, it is relatively Eurocentric: the core–periphery conceptual matrix makes such categories as ‘development’ and ‘backwardness’ difficult to deconstruct even for authors who are aware of their problematic nature. Secondly, it has trouble analysing discourses: instead, it prefers dealing with ideologies, which are then grouped together with other factors of social development. Taken together, these two relative weaknesses make it ill-suited for the analysis of identity-related developments, including such phenomena as Russia’s normative dependence on the West. As I show in two subsequent chapters, these factors are crucial for the understanding of the interplay of the domestic and the international in Russian politics.

Dependency theory, which mostly operates at the level of national economies, does not find Russia very interesting either: other, more peripheral cases provide much more spectacular evidence. The other obvious explanation is the historical context: dependency theory emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when speaking about the socialist camp as a dependent semi-periphery would have required quite a bit of imagination. Instead, the focus of the early theorists of

*dependencia* was almost exclusively on Latin America (Gunder Frank 1967, Dos Santos 1970a, 1970b, Cardoso and Faletto 1979, cf. McEwan 2009: 96–8).

More important than the area focus, however, have been certain inherent limitations of dependency theory, mostly stemming from the way it plugs into the Marxist tradition. Many of these weaknesses have been recently highlighted by postcolonial scholars. In particular, dependency theory has never been able to completely overcome economic reductionism, a distinctive trend with much neo-Marxist thinking, where “material” considerations [are] thought to operate separately from and take precedence over “cultural” ones’ (Zein-Elabdin 2011: 43). Neo-Marxism thus takes a ‘superstructural’ view of identities, discourses and other ‘cultural’ phenomena, recognising their impact on empirical developments, but never as constitutive elements of the social reality. This points towards a broader issue, which Eiman Zein-Elabdin identifies as ‘the historicist convergence of Marxian and neoclassical development economics’ (Zein-Elabdin 2011: 52, see also Zein-Elabdin 2001). Ilan Kapoor (2002: 654–5) describes it as hidden Orientalism, while Kate Manzo (1991: 6) speaks about entrapment ‘within a modernist discourse’ – a teleological view of history, ‘which accepts the Western model of national autonomy with growth as the appropriate one to emulate’. Besides, the undifferentiated and totalising understanding of power leads to a situation where the periphery is being denied any subjectivity whatsoever, while the coloniser remains the only subject (even though his agency might also be conditioned by the logic of capital).

Dependency theory thus remains blind to the hybrid subjectivity of the colonised, which emerges from within the master discourse (Bhabha 2005, see also Kapoor 2002: 651–2, 655–8). In as much as the colonised are, within the dependency framework, capable of acquiring subjectivity, this can only be done by means of a sovereign nation state. Consequently, theorists of dependency tend to advocate confronting the oppressors directly by, firstly, achieving national liberation and, secondly, securing autonomous statehood and at least some degree of independence from global capitalism. This is exactly what postcolonial theory is wary about, as ‘directly counter-hegemonic discourse is more liable to cancellation or even reappropriation by the dominant than a “tangential”, of “wild”, guerrilla mode of engagement’ (Moore-Gilbert 1997: 85, see also Kapoor 2002: 652). The validity of this criticism was later confirmed by scholars who attempted to moderate the binary outlook of dependency theory and eventually came up with the concept of ‘postdependency’ (Evans 1979, James 1997). They specifically

emphasised 'internalisation of capitalism' – the term referring to the widespread involvement of local actors in the capitalist exploitation of their fellow countrymen.

Even though dependency theory lost much of its appeal by the time postcolonial studies were established as a theoretical subfield during the 1980s, its legacy was upheld by scholars working in the neo-Marxist tradition. They often criticise postcolonial theory for ignoring the economic aspects of the colonial legacy, and thus for its anti-Marxist bias (Ahmad 1992), as well as for the 'rejection of capitalism as a "foundational category"' (Dirlik 1997: 505). According to Kapoor (2002: 661), this criticism helps to highlight a few weak spots in postcolonial theorising. Thus, the 'emphasis on cultural and representational issues leads it to ignore important material concerns (e.g. poverty, health, etc.)'. Focusing on culture, and thus on discourses and narratives, postcolonialism is unable to provide any point of reference to adjudicate between different claims made in the name of the subaltern. All it does is write up an endless registry of postcolonial concerns, being unable to establish links between isolated situations and thus incapable of translating criticism into political demands.

To be fair, economic issues have never been completely ignored in postcolonial theory (see McEwan 2009: 112–16, Pollard et al. 2011a: 6–9, Zein-Elabdin 2011: 44–7); this problematic has also been addressed by individual empirical studies (e.g. Gupta 1998, Gidwani 2008, Wainwright 2008). In the last decade or so, this engagement has become more systematic and rose to the level of conceptual and methodological reflection (e.g. Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela 2004, Kapoor 2008, McEwan 2009, Zein-Elabdin 2009, Pollard et al. 2011b). However, it is still not entirely clear whether it is possible to reconcile the rejection of ideal/material dualism in postcolonial theory with a focus on the economy as a distinct domain of the social. This tension is evident, *inter alia*, in Zein-Elabdin's rejection of the notion of dependency and economic marginalisation advanced by neo-Marxist writers. She suggests that 'it is more accurate to think of "underdeveloped" countries as subaltern, namely, they are discursively constructed as dependent, and silenced by the development discourse' (Zein-Elabdin 2011: 46).

Orientalisation and self-Orientalisation of Russia as a backward country can indeed be interpreted as a case where native experience is not allowed to speak for itself, being silenced by the discourse of development. Moreover, there is an interesting twist to this argument in the contemporary setting: while postcolonial authors concentrate on

criticising how 'worlding' (Spivak 1985) has naturalised Western superiority over the 'Third World' (Kapoor 2004, McEwan 2009: 128–31), the latter still has remained an important reference point in the global discourse of justice. The Second World, on the contrary, has been 'unworlded' after the end of communism: the countries of the former socialist bloc are expected to merge into the global core, while the specificity of their historical experience is no longer even recognised. To some extent, this silencing could be even more radical than that exercised through the conventional mechanisms of colonial domination.

However, subsuming dependency under the category of the subaltern implies that were these countries not silenced, their respective economic models could offer alternatives to capitalism, or at least demonstrate some irreducible 'native' dynamics, currently obscured by the totalising logic of capitalist knowledge production. While some case studies indeed demonstrate the existence of such autonomous peripheral enclaves (e.g. Kaul 2011, Lim 2011), there are also economies such as Russia, where not much remains to be 'silenced', as all significant aspects of the country's economic development can be adequately accounted for in terms of dependency. Small enclaves of non-capitalist production and exchange might exist on the margins of the Russian economy, but few of them are immune from the consequences of Russia's integration into the capitalist world-system. In any case, it is the latter process, and not the marginal alternatives, which defines the social structure and the mode of production of the entire nation, and enters in a co-constitutive relationship with the discursive background of Russia's identity politics. In my opinion, therefore, it makes sense to speak of Russia as a subaltern empire in terms of its positioning in international society, but as a dependent country in economic terms.

Instead of discarding the notion of dependency, it would make more sense to embrace ontological monism by insisting on 'the fact that discourse itself is intensely material'. Cheryl McEwan (2009: 112) maintains that 'this has been demonstrated with examples ranging from the ordering of imperial and postcolonial urban spaces, to the materialities of travel and emigration, to concerns with embodiment, identities, cultural politics and reconciliation'. From this perspective, the opposition between 'the material' and 'the ideational' appears as no more than an analytical tool used by humans to make sense of the complexities of the social world. At the same time, as an analytical tool, it might be useful in an empirical enquiry. As an illustration, Russia's ambiguous relationship with Europe might be either understood in identity terms or explained as an outcome of the struggle among various

groupings within the Russian elites. However, the split in the elites is in itself a result of Russia's subaltern position in the current world-system. The clash between the 'oil lobby' and the liberal proponents of modernisation is a consequence of the country's role as a 'raw materials producing appendage' of Europe, desperately trying to achieve an equal status among 'civilised countries'. The resulting contradictions (of both an economic and political nature) provide fuel for the ongoing struggle in the discursive battlefield. At the same time, historically sedimented discourses also serve as resources for both sides, enabling them to appeal to common-sense understandings of Russia's national mission and role in the world. Far from being incompatible, 'materialist' and 'ideational' accounts can be seen as addressing different aspects of the same condition, which is in my view best captured by the term 'subaltern empire'.

Consequently, I see no problem in employing such concepts as 'global capitalism', 'development' and 'dependency' in my study of Russia's subaltern imperialism. In that regard, my position is closer to that of Kapoor (2002), who questions the possibility of a synthesis between dependency theory and postcolonialism, but nevertheless sees the controversy between them as productive for the social sciences as a whole. In so much as my theoretical task is to push postcolonial theory towards some uneasy questions that arise from an analysis of the Russian case, drawing on conceptual tools from a rival tradition makes even more sense.

Moreover, I would argue that twentieth-century Marxism and its intellectual heirs such as world-systems theory can provide us with additional conceptual tools, enriching our analysis. As I have repeatedly pointed out, especially in Chapter 2, I see a key strength of postcolonial theory as applied to Russia in its ability to integrate different levels of analysis, and in particular to see domestic developments as conditioned by such global phenomena as colonialism and Eurocentrism. To be able to account for the material aspects of this conditioning, however, postcolonialism could benefit from taking on board the concept of uneven and combined development. This conceptual framework is of distinct neo-Marxist pedigree: it was most thoroughly described by Leon Trotsky (1962, 1964) and later brought into the IR debate by scholars like Justin Rosenberg (2005, 2006) and Kamran Matin (2007, 2013a, 2013b).<sup>3</sup> In between, as Rosenberg points out, there have been studies which looked at the paradoxes of late modernisation – both at its advantages (Veblen 1964, Gerschenkron 1962) and its complications (Moore 1967, Skocpol 1979). However, those works were essentially comparativist

in focus and therefore treated 'the international as a source of variables external to the overall developmental process itself' (Rosenberg 2005: 41).

The literature on Russia's internal colonisation (see Chapter 1) makes a similar mistake by trivialising the international context and eventually failing to see Russian capitalism and imperialism as part of the capitalist world-system. On the contrary, for Rosenberg, as for Trotsky, "combined development" [is] a phenomenon not of individual societies alone, but of the evolving international social formation as a whole' (Rosenberg 2005: 41). This is not yet enough to make one's thinking immune to Eurocentrism: for instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 9) points out that many scholars continue to view unevenness as mere lagging behind of certain regions or social groups. Still, a systemic understanding of the *combined* nature of uneven development enables one to fully accommodate postcolonial insights about the effect of colonialism on the imperial centre, and not just on the colonised periphery. Furthermore, development in this case is understood as 'the concrete and dynamic expression of the uneven and combined nature of social change and, therefore, cannot be either unilinear, homogeneous, or homogenizing' (Matin 2013b: 368, see also Rosenberg 2006: 308). Bearing this in mind, 'peripheral development' can remain a fully legitimate term, provided that it is taken to denote a particular type of combined development and that core development is not interpreted as free of any complications caused by global inequalities.

This attitude is adopted by the more recent literature on the 'second-image reversed', which, to varying degrees, has also been inspired by postcolonial theory, constructivist identity studies and poststructuralist discourse analysis. In Ayşe Zarakol's work, the main emphasis has been on demonstrating how 'the international system affects not only the political and economic development of particular countries, but also how various social groups understand their own identity and characterize their opposition' (2013: 150). Her comparison of Turkey and Thailand is premised on a logic very similar to that of uneven and combined development. The material and ideational pressures that both the Ottoman and the Thai empires experienced in the nineteenth century due to their encounters with European empires led to a catching-up modernisation driven by the military bureaucrats. These rulers did not see any need for an autonomous bourgeoisie, but were 'motivated by enlightenment goals to rescue a traditional society from superstition' (2013: 157). In the long run, modernisation benefited the urban middle class, which embraced secular values and the national identity

promoted by the state. After 1980, both countries experienced economic and political liberalisation, which led to the emergence of 'the new bourgeoisie', with its roots in traditionalist rural communities. This created the background to the current polarisation in both Turkish and Thai politics, which Zarakol describes as a clash between the old and the new middle class.

Even though these clashes between the two middle classes might be due to the unique historical experiences of both Turkey and Thailand, the emphasis on the role of the middle class is characteristic also for the literature on the present and future role of the so-called emerging powers. A key factor conditioning the development of Brazil, China and India is the conflict between the prosperous urban strata and the poor population of the rural areas, usually sharing a much more traditionalist outlook (Saul 2012: 331–4). Once again, the logic of uneven and combined development has put these countries in a structurally similar situation, where rapid growth massively aggravated inequality.

Russia stands out among other cases of semi-peripheral development in the sense that its entanglement in the hierarchical international system has probably been longer and more complex. It is defined not that much by a class conflict in the standard sense, but by subaltern imperialism, which manifested itself in a self-colonisation of its vast periphery on behalf of the global core. The paradoxical nature of this phenomenon and the depth of its reach have had a profound impact on how the conflict between modernity and tradition is framed in the Russian case. It is a conflict between two Eurocentric world views, in which the discursively constructed figure of the native has almost no ground in the material reality. Demonstrating this necessitates a brief retrospective analysis of Russia's entry into the capitalist world-system.

### **Self-colonisation and its alternatives**

When it emerged as a political entity in the ninth century A.D., Russia was not a peripheral country. As argued by Boris Kagarlitsky and Vsevolod Sergeev in their world-systemic overview of Russian history, Kiev and Novgorod – two leading centres of medieval Russia – can be counted as belonging to the core of the economic and political structures that took shape in Europe and the greater Middle East. Similarly, the relative decay of Kiev and Novgorod in the thirteenth century was due to a changing trade pattern, which brought about new leaders: 'While Venice and Genoa forced Kiev out of global trade, the Hanseatic League turned Novgorod into its own periphery' (Kagarlitsky

and Sergeev 2013: 59). However, the North-Eastern Rus, increasingly centred on Moscow, benefitted from this restructuring and for a while developed on par with Western Europe.

The first time the problem of relative underdevelopment befell Moscow with a vengeance was at the turn of the sixteenth century, when global trade fully and irreversibly moved from river and overland routes to the high seas. No longer able to control the trade flows, Muscovy plugged into the emerging capitalist global economy as a supplier of raw materials: furs, wax, hemp, flax and, as of late eighteenth century, grain.

In Etkind's account, the fur trade was absolutely central to Russia's expansion and the establishment of internal colonial relations. What needs to be emphasised here is the external dimension: the fur economy was driven by external demand; it had formative significance not just for Russia's own periphery (which Etkind analyses in a superb way, see 2011: 72–90) but also for the country's international standing and domestic institutional development. Kagarlitsky and Sergeev (2013) insist that Russian capitalism remained resource driven after the decline of the fur trade, with grain exports playing the most important role in locking Russia into this model. This contradicts Etkind's interpretation of resource dependence as an intermittent pattern: 'There have been two resource-bound periods of Russian history', he writes, 'the era of fur and the era of gas. Historically discontinuous, these two periods feature uncanny similarities' (2011: 89). Kagarlitsky and Sergeev, for their part, describe Perestroika and the post-Soviet market reforms as the 'restoration of peripheral capitalism' (2013: 398), even though their own analysis makes it plain that such restoration began no later than in the early 1970s and became irreversible by around 1980. In both cases, the denial of continuity seems to originate in the authors' normative agenda. Viewing Russia's dependence on the capitalist core (not just in terms of exports but also as regards technology, institutions and norms) as a continuous phenomenon eliminates the puzzles and contradictions: instead of 'uncanny similarities', we observe an uninterrupted paradigm.

As a supplier of raw materials for industrialising Europe, it came to occupy the same niche as England's colonies in North America (Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013: 101). Unequal terms of trade, however, were only part of the story. In Thomas Willan's (1956) account, the English experience in Russia (as well as Persia) helped devise the colonial administration in India and other colonies. The Muscovy Company, established under Ivan IV, was in this sense a precursor of the East India Company, while England in both cases represented the global empire.



Russia's own system of governance, while based on sovereign statehood, was nevertheless deeply affected by the country's subaltern position. This manifested itself in the dominant role of the state in society and the economy: picking up from Pavel Miliukov and Terence Emmons, Etkind calls this state 'hypertrophic' and 'hyperactive' (2011: 81). In a resource-oriented economy, be it fur or gas,

the one-sided development of a highly profitable extraction industry leaves the rest of the economy uncompetitive and undeveloped. In the *longue durée* of Russian history, taxing the trade in these commodities has become the source of income for the state; organizing their extraction, its preoccupation; securing the lines of transportation that stretch across Eurasia, its responsibility . . . Very few people take part in [the extraction] business, with the result that the state does not care about the population and the population does not care about the state. A caste-like society emerges in these conditions. The security apparatus becomes identical to the state.

(Etkind 2011: 88–9)

To some extent, heavy centralisation and militarisation was an in-born feature of the Muscovite polity, which was established by the Mongols as a tool to ensure regular inflow of tribute from the Russian lands (Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013: 76), but later helped Moscow to gain independence from the Mongol Khans and start 'gathering' the Russian lands. However, even more crucial for fixing the preponderance of the state was the combined nature of Russia's transition from subsistence to commodity economy, which occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and coincided with the beginning of imperial development.

By that time, the Russian economy had been already fully specialised in the production of raw materials for the rapidly growing West European cities. As a result, control over land, and thus the resource rent, was the key instrument of state power.<sup>4</sup> It also necessitated territorial expansion and the enserfment of the peasantry (Etkind 2011: 124–8). The Russian state has been the ultimate economic actor in deciding who gets what in terms of property rights and entitlements. As Theda Skocpol (1979: 85–94) famously emphasised in her comparative analysis, the Russian landed nobility was structurally weak vis-à-vis the state (see also Greenfeld 1992: 204–22), whereas the accumulation of trade and industrial capital critically depended on a government-instituted system of privileges, coercion and expenditure (see also

Randall 2001: 21–42, Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013: 193–219). As highlighted by Trotsky (1964), a key force that locked backward states in the pattern of uneven and combined development was geopolitical competition. In the short run, state-driven economic development was often more efficient than its alternatives, as it allowed the quick mobilisation of the resources required for nearly permanent wars (which were, in turn, needed for expanding and securing the empire). In the long run, it cemented Russia's lagging behind Western Europe, whose industrial capitalism had been able to deliver more in terms of financial resources and technologies, also for the military sphere.

It is definitely true that Russia was lagging behind only in the Eurocentric system of coordinates that was set by the hegemonic position of Western Europe in the emerging global international society. 'The total universe of pasts that capital encounters is larger than the sum of those elements in which are worked out the logical presuppositions of capital', Chakrabarty (2000: 64) writes in his seminal re-interpretation of the key Marxian category. The imperial space of early modern Russia was diverse enough to include numerous potentialities for alternative development – from the late medieval trading republic of Novgorod, conquered by Moscow in 1471–78, to miscellaneous autonomous communities in the imperial periphery, some of which were subdued by the Bolsheviks as late as in the twentieth century. Illustrating contradictions of Russia's internal colonisation, Etkind (2011: 114–20) describes a phenomenon that he dubs 'negative hegemony' ('reverse hegemony' might be a better alternative). In some peripheral areas – he gives the examples of the North Caucasus and Yakutia – in the mid-nineteenth century, members of the colonial army and administration became partly assimilated into the local communities. For instance, the language of the urbane colonial society in Yakutsk was Yakut, and it played the same role as French did in the capitals. Whether such typical cases of cultural hybridity could have led to the establishment of local orders at least partially exempt from the totalising influence of global capitalism is an open question. In any case, however, Soviet modernisation later completely wiped out such alternatives at the normative level, if not at the level of local practices. If such hybridisation exists today, it is considered weird and exotic and thus belonging in a museum rather than in any blueprint for the future.<sup>5</sup>

In principle, Russia could have produced an alternative model of social and political development – in the same sense as we might consider as alternatives the pre-colonial societies outside Europe, or such competitors of the early modern territorial state as autonomous cities

and the Holy Roman Empire (cf. Tilly 1975). However, what happened instead was Russia's integration, at an early stage, into the capitalist world-system. It was the Russian empire which first internalised 'a stagist theory of history', a view that 'some people were less modern than others' (Chakrabarty 2000: 9) and then imposed it on the subaltern groups in its own periphery. The inevitable resentment on the part of the educated classes has never produced any viable alternatives: Russian political and cultural thought forever remained locked in the Eurocentric system of coordinates, rejecting the present and desperately trying to imagine Russia's future as a triumph over the West (Greenfeld 1992: 222–74). Students of Eurasianist ideology often claim that the latter did work out a version of Russian national identity that separated Russia from Europe and provided a powerful critique of European imperialism. I would, however, insist that the Eurasianists' obsession with separating Russia from Europe is the best proof of their Eurocentric outlook. Besides, their ideas have hardly ever really influenced political outcomes. It might be that they have got their best chance under Putin's third presidency, when the Eurasianist tradition is explicitly referred to as the ideological basis for post-Soviet integration. Yet it is also the best proof of its Eurocentrism: as I show in the next chapter, the current conservative agenda is purely negative and envisages Russia as an alternative Europe, and not some sort of the 'new East'.

Thus, Russia's self-colonisation consisted not simply in subduing non-Russian communities or Russian peasants. It was also a process in which the modern state, integrated into the capitalist international society, gradually expanded its control over all parts of its vast domain, assimilating 'all other possibilities of human solidarity' (Chakrabarty 2000: 45) into the Eurocentric colonial order. Russia's belonging to European international society was not limited to economic and security structures: it was also a European power in terms of its identity, and at least as early as the seventeenth century, it embarked on a Europeanising mission among its own population. As Adam Watson notes in his description of Russia's entry into European international society, 'the expansion of Europe beyond its own cultural boundaries' led to 'the replacement of a previous culturally monolithic society by a new type of state... controlled by a small – often tiny – Western or Westernized élite, very different from the great majority made up of un-Westernized former nobility, religious figures, and the lower ranks of society' (Watson 1984: 74). Very much like Chakrabarty's colonial India, Russia was and continues to be 'both the subject and the object of modernity', an

imaginary unity ‘that is always split into two – a modernizing elite and a yet-to-be modernized peasantry’ (Chakrabarty 2000: 40).

This resonates with Geoffrey Hosking’s (1997: xxiv) thesis that ‘in Russia state-building obstructed nation-building’: ‘the subjection of virtually the whole population, but especially the Russians, to the demands of state service... enfeebled the creation of the community associations which commonly provide the basis for the civic sense of nationhood’. Combined with ‘the borrowing of a foreign culture and ethos’, this created a vast gap between the nobility and the people. By the time of Peter I, this gap had acquired a distinct cultural dimension, famously captured by Etkind (2002, 2011: 101–10) as the opposition between ‘the Shaven Man’ and ‘the Bearded Man’. Under Catherine II, the Russian empire even physically ‘imported’ Europeans – mostly German settlers – in the hope that it would have a civilising impact on the wider society (Etkind 2011: 128–33). Contrariwise, the Russian peasant – as distinct from his Indian counterpart described by Chakrabarty – has ever since remained an exotic figure, the bearer of ‘alternative logic which does not follow “urban” rules’ (Etkind et al. 2012: 25). While this logic has been aestheticised by such writers as Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, Nikolai Leskov and Andrey Platonov and later by the Soviet village prose, it did not normally serve as a source of political inspiration. For nineteenth-century socialists and nationalists who, following Alexander Herzen, promoted the idealised image of the peasant commune (Acton 1979, Etkind 2011: 137–43), this image was primarily a projection of their own interpretation of the European Enlightenment.

In her analysis of contemporary Russian film, Nancy Condee makes an astute observation about one of the commonplace themes in Russian culture – ‘the journey to the hinterland as the journey to home and childhood’. This journey is made by the Russian intellectual caught in the interstice between the Western core and the colonial periphery:

the Petrine Newly Shaven, having already entered into the game of Europe, came to narrate the rural, Russian Bearded Man as if the Shaven Man himself had *always already* been beardless... Having encountered his difference from the Westerner, but then in turn displacing the category of difference from the self onto the Bearded Man, this newly Europeanized self – a self, not coincidentally, in increasing control of the economy of cultural representations – rendered the Bearded Man newly legible, retrospectively ascribing

difference to the very social strata who lacked cultural resources to contest that ascription.

(2009: 34)

Condee needs this point first and foremost to demonstrate that internal colonisation was 'not a primary colonial relationship but a necessary and secondary variation, an afterthought of Russia's imperially inflected experience of state formation from Ivan forward' (2009: 33). In my view, two additional points bear highlighting: firstly, the primary imperial move had a marked external dimension, inscribing the Russian nobleman in European international society as a liminal figure with an undecidable, hybrid identity. This reflected, in the ideational domain, the dependent nature of the country's economic development, while both taken together defined the subaltern character of Russian imperialism. In that respect, the position of the Russian 'Shaven Man' is no different from that of postcolonial Indian intellectuals, whom Sankaran Krishna (2013: 132) portrays as 'injured selves oscillating between the home and the world, the national and the international, vainly looking for that moment when they could go through the looking-glass, and finally reunite with the split self staring back at them'.

Secondly, 'the journey home' was a product of colonial imagination: the figure of the Russian peasant as the bearer of difference and the subject of compassion was structurally analogous to the 'noble savage' of European colonialism, not to Chakrabarty's peasant as the custodian of anti-historical memories. The mistrust of the people, the fear of the 'Russian mutiny, pointless and merciless' in many respects predetermined the vicious circle of catch-up modernisation followed by reaction which forms the characteristic pattern of Russian history. Again, it is hybridity that is at work here, but, compared to the reverse ('negative') hegemony as described by Etkind, it works in a subtler, yet much more profound, way. Instead of superficial cultural hybridisation (bilingualism, mimicry, etc.), we are dealing with a nostalgic moment, which, by imagining a home that is nowhere to be found, highlights the difference between that past home and the present which is located in the 'civilised world'. This moment is thus both self-traumatising and violent in relation to what is perceived as 'rudiments of the past'. In the end, as Mark Lipovetsky insightfully puts it, 'it looks like the reason for the repletion of stereotyped and overlapping historical traumas lies in the very fact that Russian modernisation does not know (does not search for) other ways of effective realisation, except for internal colonisation' (Lipovetsky and Etkind 2008).

Looking from this perspective, one has to agree with Skocpol that imperial Russia was not 'a semicolony of Western Europe', as it 'continued to operate as a competing Great Power in the European states system' (1979: 93). It was, however, a subaltern empire, which, while being acutely aware of its own backwardness and trying to overcome it, ended up reproducing the unequal relationship between the capitalist core and the colonised periphery.

It is for this reason that, while fully sharing Chakrabarty's suspicion against Eurocentrism inherent in theories of uneven development, I nevertheless believe that approaching Russia's current development as part of European, and only European, modernity is fully justified. In Chakrabarty's reading of Marx, the historical logic of capital never unfolds to the limit: 'a process of deferral [is] internal to the very being (that is, logic) of capital' (2000: 65). Consequently, '[c]apital is a philosophical-historical category – that is, historical difference is not external to it but is rather constitutive of it' (2000: 70, see also Seth 2013b: 148–9). At the same time, treating Russia as an 'alternative modernity' capable of interrupting and deferring the logic of capital would mean going back to historicist logic by taking Russia as a unified object of enquiry, as a bounded entity which develops through time in accordance with its own inherent teleology.

On the contrary, abandoning the historicist perspective necessitates the acknowledgement that capital encounters histories as its antecedents 'everywhere – even in the West' (Chakrabarty 2000: 69). The Russian state and the imperial order that it promoted in its own periphery was implicated in the logic of capitalist development (including its cultural aspects) to the same extent as the states of Western Europe – it simply occupied a different position in the hierarchy of the capitalist world-system. As it unfolded, the capitalist world-system encountered and probably continues to encounter its antecedents in Russia as well as in the West, but they are neither 'Russian' nor 'Western' – by definition, they cannot be subsumed under these historicist categories.

Thus, far from being an embodiment of 'alternative modernity' or a non-modern entity, Russia fulfilled the role of an eccentric offshoot of the European civilisation. Russia's position provides a perfect illustration of the hegemonic nature of the European international hierarchy. There was, in all conceivable terms, a difference between Russia and (the rest of) Europe, and this difference often produced antagonism. At other moments, however, the difference could be subsumed under a shared identity, which led to Russia's acceptance of its own backwardness and the need to modernise in accordance with the European models.

## **Social structure, institutions and the state**

As suggested in the previous section, the early development of the resource economy in Russia resulted in the emergence of a state which totally dominated civil society.<sup>6</sup> While business was dependent on government-administered concessions, it was the state which had to serve as the driving force of the repeated modernisation attempts. At the same time, since the state was mostly doing this to ensure its own power vis-à-vis rival states, often after military defeats (Gerschenkron 1968: 142–7, Skocpol 1979: 82–99), Russian modernisation has been selective: it has focused on the technological aspects, whereas institutions have always been of secondary importance. Starting from the early eighteenth century, the state has been relatively successful in promoting industrialisation, but not to the extent of completely eliminating the distance between Russia and Western Europe. Even as indigenous large-scale accumulation of capital indeed began in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century (Mandel 1978: 54–5), the Russian economy as a whole was still heavily dependent on foreign direct investment and loans (Skocpol 1979: 92–3). Besides, the lack of a domestic market wide enough to sustain competitive domestic production made Russian industries even more dependent on state support for their external expansion (Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013: 283).

The early development of a centralised and militarised state with its grip over the economy, as well as the persistence of resource-oriented economic development, constitute the two main distinctive features of Russia, compared to other latecomers in the international system, and it has continued as such until this day (Baev 2008). Another major development that made Russia's situation even more peculiar was the October revolution of 1917, which might have given Russia its only chance ever to change track and move away from the Eurocentric path, at least in terms of presenting a radical alternative to capitalist development. This was true despite the fact that the Bolshevik ideology was Eurocentric in its origins and key assumptions. Not just Eurocentric thinking, but the dire economic situation which Soviet Russia found itself in during the Civil War and once again during the late 1920s, left the government with little choice but to follow the same peripheral model, albeit in a very radical style (Skocpol 1979: 212–33).

On the one hand, the Soviet Union was a quintessentially modern society. The impact of Soviet modernisation on nearly all aspects of social life is undeniable: massive industrialisation and urbanisation, universal education and health care as well as top-down secularisation

completely transformed Russian society. As a result, the Soviet Union reached the status of one of the two superpowers and in many respects became much closer to the West than any of its predecessors.

On the other hand, Soviet modernisation, even more than its precursors, was driven by the Soviet party-state, which emerged out of the total mobilisation of 'war communism' during the Civil War. By the mid-1930s, this state established a hierarchical and coercive system of control over all spheres of social life (Skocpol 1979: 212–20, 226–33, Nove 1992: 214–21). Wars and Stalinist purges, followed by 'the period of stagnation' under Brezhnev, produced a degraded class structure and an even more anomic society. The workers, the peasants, the officialdom, the intelligentsia – all of these social groups were decimated by the purges, while the entrepreneurial class was completely wiped out and replaced by a very different species, the Soviet manager (Verdery 1996: 19–38, Randall 2001: 43–63).

The Russian peasantry had never possessed sufficient resources to play any autonomous political role, except for presenting a constant threat of rebellion. It was in this capacity that it acted, very prominently, in the 1917 revolution and initially benefited from it by seizing and redistributing the bulk of agricultural lands. Later, however, the peasantry had to go through the particularly cruel collectivisation and never recovered thereafter (Skocpol 1979: 128–40, 223–9). Probing into 'the sharp and growing cleavage' between town and country under Stalin, Alvin Gouldner concluded as early as 1977 that Stalinist bureaucracy was 'an urban-centered power elite that had set out to dominate a largely rural society to which they related as an alien colonial power' (1977: 13); he even described 'peasants as the Soviet's Indians and the Soviet countryside as a continental reservation' (1977: 41, see also Viola 1996, Uffelmann 2012: 59–60). In the post-Stalin period, the peasantry was either left to struggle on its own or became subject to new reckless experimentation (Nove 1992: 372–82).

The other groups, on the contrary, expanded in numerical terms, but this happened at the expense of continuity and thus significantly damaged their class identity. Within the command economy created by the industrialisation of the early 1930s, the workers (and the trade unions) lost their independent standing and became the key element in the huge machinery of state capitalism (Cliff 1974, Skocpol 1979: 220, 228). Their central position, both in the system of production and ideologically, gave them a lot of bargaining power, but 'translating it onto genuine proletarian politics was an extremely difficult task' (Derluigian 2005: 119). Consequently, class struggle mostly



happened in the form of looking for ways to tacitly reduce labour inputs (Derluguian 2005: 119–20, 141–4, see also Burawoy 1985, Filtzer 1992). The intelligentsia, while still possessing a high standing, was similarly converted into a part of the Soviet system of production and control and, in this sense, proletarianised (Derluguian 2005: 144–8). Even though this conversion was never completely successful, it created new, and much more efficient, institutional mechanisms promoting conformism and strongly discouraging critical thinking (Randall 2001: 49–59). The old bureaucracy and the military were completely subdued by the repressions, which in relative terms affected these groups more than others (Conquest 1973: 182–249, 445–57). In the end, what defined one's social status in late Soviet times was not one's place in the system of material and cognitive production, but rather membership in the *nomenklatura* – the privileged superior part of the state apparatus which, in effect, operated under a special system of rules outside of the law that applied to the ordinary citizens (Derluguian 2005: 137–41).

Stalinist industrialisation followed the previous peripheral model of capital accumulation by exchanging grain for technologies on the international market and thus was vulnerable to external shocks. Arguably, the Great Depression and the ensuing worldwide depreciation of crops made the decision to industrialise through coercive collectivisation and extreme exploitation, expropriation and, to an extent, physical destruction of the peasantry almost inevitable (Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013: 340–62). While industrialisation enabled the Soviet economy to move away from the peripheral model in the sense of developing some independent industrial and technological capacity, the legacy of combined development survived in the form of over-centralisation and total domination of the state over civil society. The Cold War setting, which in itself can be interpreted as a consequence of uneven and combined development, was conducive to the massive militarisation of the Soviet economy, with the total costs related to security and safeguarding the empire estimated at around one quarter of gross national product (Epstein 1990: 153). Even though the Soviet military-industrial complex was able to keep on the cutting edge in some high-tech segments and earn hard currency on the global market, its positive impact on the economy as a whole was limited due to poor commercialisation (Derluguian 2005: 118). The defence industry was also heavily dependent on the subsidies originating from the hydrocarbons sector and tended to overproduce weapons and other emergency supplies (Rosefield 2013).

The inefficiency of this system eventually led it back to the pattern of dependency on raw material exports during the late 1960s and 1970s. Two components of this new addiction made it worse than ever before: firstly, the exports were much less diversified compared to the previous periods, consisting mostly of hydrocarbons. The entire economy quickly became dependent on the exchange of oil and gas for high value added goods (Robinson 2013: 18–19), including equipment for oil and gas extraction and processing. The most advanced technologies, including those for enhanced recovery of oil from depleted fields, never reached Soviet industry, often because of Western embargoes, and that could not but affect the efficiency of production even further (Goldman 2008: 33–49). The result was a mounting trade balance deficit in spite of the growing exports (Kagarlitsky and Sergeev 2013: 373–91).

Secondly, the production and export of all goods was completely monopolised by the state and run by the respective ministries. The autonomy of the Soviet manager, limited as it was, was exercised under the macroeconomic conditions where the state, with its control over investment and foreign trade, was able to cushion the effects of mismanagement both at the micro and macro level (Kornai 1992: 140–5, 160–71, Verdery 1996: 21). The result was that the state, which had historically dominated the Russian society and economy, became even more overwhelming towards the end of Brezhnev's rule. Its strength was of course relative: inefficient and corrupt, it was simply much stronger than any other social force. It was only the economic collapse of the mid- to late 1980s, combined with the revolutionary impetus from Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika, that suddenly changed the balance and revealed the weakness of the state in absolute terms (Mau and Starodubrovskaja 2001).

The revolution, which was largely completed by 1990, even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulted in the official abandonment of the Soviet alternative, both as a domestic and a global project. The post-Soviet Russia made an attempt to rejoin the international society on Western terms, which meant facing the dilemmas of uneven and combined development in their full scale again. The collapse of the planned economy stripped the state of financial means and left continued reliance on exporting raw materials the only option, at least in the short to medium run. The only hope of breaking away from the shackles of peripheral development consisted in building strong institutions (Randall 2001, Treisman 2011: 205–7). This task was confounded by the fact that Russia undertook its 'transition' at the moment when the global normative horizon was defined by neo-liberal hegemony, whose

dogmatic promotion of the 'invisible hand' of the market drove the Russian reformers towards a minimalist understanding of institutions and their role in market democracy (Randall 2001: 162).

The latter point is contradicted by Peter Rutland (2013), who argues that the reforms deviated from the neo-liberal orthodoxy where it fitted the self-interest of the ruling elites. Either way, the transition ended up reinstating the traditional model of state-driven development (Robinson 2013: 28–45), while the state again performed the function of a colonising agent – perhaps even more so than under the communist rule (Etkind et al. 2012: 30–1). The reformers fully recognised the need to create an independent class of entrepreneurs and embarked on a rather radical programme of privatisation (Treisman 2011: 203–5). However, the odds were against them: the Soviet manager could not be directly converted into the entrepreneur, the larger society was anomic and unable to relinquish its paternalistic expectations, while organised crime took over some of the functions 'normally' performed by the state (Randall 2001: 167–72). The paternalistic attitudes were exploited by the communist opposition, which fiercely resisted privatisation, especially of land and other natural resources. The oil industry, as well as the major metallurgical works and many other large-scale enterprises were privatised, but mostly through non-market mechanisms like the notorious 'loans for shares' auctions. This ensured the transfer of the assets to the entrepreneurs close to the government and created the future 'oligarchs' – tycoons who were powerful enough to have significant influence on policymaking in the Kremlin (Guriev and Rachinsky 2005, Goldman 2008: 61–72, Kryukov and Moe 2013b: 346–52, Rutland 2013).

The gas sector, on the contrary, remained under state control: the Ministry of Gas Industry was transformed into the State Gas Concern Gazprom, which was incorporated in 1993 and privatised as of 1994. However, the state share never went below 38 per cent, and was increased again in 2005 to ensure full government control over the company (Goldman 2008: 59–61, 83, 104–5). In addition, the laws adopted in 2006–08 ensured Gazprom's export monopoly and limited foreign investment in oil and other 'strategic' sectors of the economy (Kryukov and Moe 2013a, 2013b). Other big chunks of the Soviet economy were formally privatised while effectively remaining under state control – this list includes giants such as the Russian Railways, Sberbank, Transneft, Rosneft and a few others. As the model of state-driven development consolidated in the second half of the 2000s, this was supplemented by the proliferation of federal corporations, such as Rosnanotekh, as well

as instruments like national projects and federal targeted programmes (Ericson 2013: 71–4).

Overall, the pro-market reforms carried through in post-Soviet Russia did produce a functioning market economy (Shleifer and Treisman 2005, Treisman 2011: 343–6), but the state remained the dominant player controlling the key factor of macroeconomic stability – the resource rent. As Clifford Gaddy and Barry Ickes (2013a) demonstrate, the resource rent has been used to pay for the preservation of the otherwise unsustainable economic structure, which is a dead end in terms of economic development. Timothy Mitchell (2011) has argued that unlike coal, the main source of energy in West European industrialisation, oil is much less labour intensive, and its abundance shields those in control of the rents from democratic pressures (see also Etkind 2014: 163–4). This probably explains why the reforms failed to create a strong civil society and any social classes or groups with enough independence from the paternalistic redistribution system: in Gerald Easter's (2013: 65) words, 'Russia's postcommunist economic elite does not own its wealth: its members are concessionaries' dependent on the state.

The middle class that emerged towards the mid-2000s lacked autonomy as well: it consisted mostly of civil servants, employees of state-controlled corporations and private sector workers whose jobs were dependent on public financing (which often also involved various corruption schemes). The peasantry was totally marginalised, both in socio-economic and discursive terms (Etkind et al. 2012: 30, Allina-Pisano 2008). Small and medium-sized businesses constituted a tiny proportion of the economy, and most of them were either contractors for the public sector or forced to contribute in cash and in kind to various programmes initiated by the local authorities. As Derluguian (2005: 141) puts it, '[t]he post-Soviet state remains omnipresent not simply because private businesses tend to fail under the present hostile conditions; the state itself, for those who enjoy privileged access to it, has become the best and biggest source of economic profit and private protection'. The predominance of the state is arguably also the main factor behind the vast regional inequalities that literally tear the Russian economy apart. Production and employment are concentrated in the capitals and oil- and gas-producing regions, while the rest of the country can barely make ends meet. Gaddy and Ickes argue that it is the entanglement between politics and economics that results in Russia's 'market-impeding federalism': budget transfers to the loser regions, which they nickname 'policy of "lights on"', play 'a central

role in the conservation of the legacies from the Soviet period, reducing mobility of both labor and capital' (2013a: 59).

Whereas in the Thai and Turkish cases, analysed by Zarakol, there has been a clash between the old and the new middle class, neither has been in existence in post-Soviet Russia. Neither the state-driven modernisation of the first half of the twentieth century nor the liberalisation of the 1990s produced any significant social groups with enough autonomy from the state. This puts Russia in sharp contrast with other emerging powers, too: their middle classes are rooted in the real economy, rather than in the state-controlled redistribution of the resource rent. Even in China, where economic growth has been taken advantage of by the ruling political elites (Hung 2009: 17–25), the society as a whole is structured in a much more robust manner. Waves of rural insurrection and unrest among the urban poor has made a significant impact on political developments in China, whereas possible social and political consequences of declining international competitiveness of Chinese industries is a factor that has to be taken into account by decision-makers even at the global level (Saul 2012: 334). Given China's role as the workshop of the world, a revolt by Chinese workers would shatter the foundations of the global capitalist order. By contrast, the only possible scenario of mass unrest in Russia would involve the state being unable to continue subsidising pensions and utilities. The sole imaginable way the Russian protesters could affect the situation outside Russia would be by disrupting oil and gas flows (which would hardly be a smart political move).

The only group in Russia that at some stage claimed autonomy from the state were the oligarchs, but they were quickly subdued by Putin through the Yukos affair and other measures, which brought the entire resource rent under the Kremlin's control, direct or indirect (Goldman 2008: 99–135, Gaddy and Ickes 2013b). Against this background, the weakness of the anti-government protests of 2011–12 and the perpetual fragmentation of the democratic opposition must come as no surprise.

This social structure stands in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the ideological domain. The dominant discourse in post-Soviet Russia from very early on was the discourse of a strong state that was responsible for every individual's well-being. The preponderance of this discourse delegitimised the pro-market reforms attempted by the liberals in the government through the 1990s and early 2000s and, conversely, empowered their opponents who had a vested interest in the preservation of state control over the economy. With the consolidation of

the authoritarian regime towards the end of Putin's second presidential term (2004–08), the strong state discourse provided legitimacy for the counter-reforms that were aimed at further buttressing the state vis-à-vis civil society, private business and foreign investors.

Such is the structural setting for the latest act in the never-ending drama of Russia's modernisation. The two defining moments of the plot, which mirror and reproduce each other, are the persistence of the resource economy and the relative stability of the discursive structure which defines Russia as a liminal country in the European borderlands and sets it in an antagonistic relationship against the West. Due to the dependence on raw material exports, control over natural wealth and redistribution of the rent become two key macroeconomic functions performed by the state. Historical weakness of civil society, which was hit particularly hard during the Soviet period, makes the state, in relative terms, disproportionately powerful. Yet, this also implies a lack of accountability, which leads to the state being corrupt and therefore extremely inefficient.

To repeat, the above brief summary of Russia's modernisation is deliberately written from a Eurocentric position. This is done with a full awareness of the postcolonial critique of Orientalism. Moreover, my point here is that there is no way to apply postcolonial theory to the analysis of the material aspects of Russia's situation other than framing it in the (consciously) Eurocentric terms of uneven and combined development. With all its internal diversity, Russia is fully locked in an unequal relationship with the global capitalist core, a relationship that deeply influences social relations everywhere, from Moscow to the out-of-the-way communities in Siberia and the Far East. It is a subaltern country, but in a rather special way.

The paradox of the Russian situation is that it is *not*, in the immediate sense, discursively constructed as dependent or subaltern. On the contrary, in the mainstream discourse, Russia would be constructed as a great European power and an integral part of Europe. It would even claim normative superiority as a nation that 'saved Europe from Nazism', as well as, more recently, a protector of 'traditional family values'. Likewise, in the Western discourse, Russia is certainly Orientalised, but seldom described in terms of dependency and underdevelopment. In order to expose Russia's subaltern position, one must look deeper: firstly, at the economic structures – in their material and discursive dimensions – and secondly, at the basic reference points of the normative order which Russia tries to uphold. It is certainly not part of the 'Third World' in any mainstream discursive mapping, but it might

be that the 'unworlding' of the communist world relegated its former leader even further to the periphery. The paradigm of postcommunist 'transition' presupposes that the former 'Second World' is now no more than a backward part of the First one; there is no independent point of reference from where one could legitimately present one's historical experience as different enough to justify special status, similar to the one enjoyed by the 'developing' countries. As I argue in the next chapter, nearly all these reference points are located outside of Russia's own discursive space. It is in these terms that Russia is wholly immersed in the hegemonic order, to the extent of having internalised its subaltern position in its own national identity discourse.

# 4

## Normative Dependency: Putinite Paleoconservatism and the Missing Peasant

As the second chapter of this book demonstrates, there is a vast and diverse literature which describes Russia's position in the international system in terms of identity, psychological complexes and power hierarchies. Chapter 3, in turn, suggests that comprehensive dependency on the capitalist core, an effect of uneven and combined development, constitutes the material foundation of the undecidable identity and the ontological insecurity that results from it. It is now time to return to the analysis of discourse in order to demonstrate that material dependency and identity-related insecurity are best understood as two aspects of one phenomenon – a subaltern condition fraught with an imperial legacy. Viewed in this light, Russia is located in an interstitial space – or, to put it more boldly, Russia itself *is* an interstice.

The Russian intellectual and political elites are acutely aware of the country's peripherality, or even backwardness, in comparison to the global capitalist core. Domestic discursive space is currently dominated by the view that this backwardness can be overcome through state-driven modernisation, while a vocal liberal minority advocates a greater role for civil society. However, there is also a more conservative camp which seems to cherish Russia's difference and oppose any attempt to integrate into the global capitalist system. The estimates of its relative significance can vary: up until recently, most authors described it as one among several major discursive positions (e.g. Hopf 2002, Prozorov 2005, 2009c, Kuchins and Zevelev 2012). Recent political developments, however, suggest a shift in favour of a more explicitly conservative position, which constructs Russia as a rival of the West in the struggle for hegemony. This greater assertiveness is evident both in domestic politics and in foreign policy. Domestically, the state has begun to actively intervene into civil society and individuals' private lives,



claiming the need to defend against outside subversion (Lipman 2013, Laruelle 2013). Internationally, Russia has become much more assertive, especially since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. The proponents of the conservative turn themselves, as well as many analysts tend to view this ideological turn as an indication of Russia finally adopting a self-standing position in international affairs. Normative dependence on the West, which lay at the basis of the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s and Medvedev's modernisation, is in this view replaced by a more independent stance.

This chapter sets out to prove the opposite, namely, that Russian imperialism is deeply conditioned by subalternity also in the normative sphere. In contrast to the previous chapter, which offered an extended retrospective, here I concentrate on recent developments. I start by demonstrating that Russia's postcommunist transition has been a subaltern experience: Russia did Europeanise during the previous two decades (and in some respects continues to do that), but the advent of its European identity has been permanently deferred by the imperial legacy. This dialectic of the subaltern and the imperial produced ontological insecurity, resulting from a failure to maintain a consistent self-concept as a European nation. Ontological insecurity generated resentment, which eventually transformed into the antagonisation of the West.

I argue that the external dimension is key to the understanding of the current ideological developments in Russia. This is evident not just in the intensified antagonisation of the West but also in how eager the Putinite conservatives are in seeking approval and support outside of the country, especially in the United States and Western Europe. These efforts are not without success: both the European and US far right see Vladimir Putin as one of their own. This is why I use the term 'paleoconservatism', borrowed from the American context, to better differentiate this radical traditionalist ideology from the previous, more moderate trends. I analyse the Kremlin's attempts to boost Russia's soft power in the international arena as a case where the subaltern aspects of Russian imperialism are particularly visible.

The chapter concludes by looking at the empty spot at the centre of Russian traditionalist discourse. While in Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) analysis the figure of the Indian peasant opposes the Eurocentric outlook by being the guardian of 'antihistorical memories', his Russian counterpart is nowhere to be found. Instead, Russian traditionalist discourse constructs the figure of the native in accordance with its own Eurocentric vocabulary, as a mirror image of the West, and in total

disregard for Russia's own subaltern periphery. This emptiness at the core of national identity discourse bodes ill for the future of Russian–Western relations: it seems that antagonising the West is the only source of Russia's self-confidence, and it is bound to continue regardless of whether the West responds by the policies of containment or accommodation.

### **Russian transition as subaltern experience**

In the previous chapter, I made a case in favour of considering Russia as an integral part of European modernity, whose difference from the West European core stems from being included in the global capitalist system as a peripheral entity, rather than from standing alone. I also indicated that a key element of this inclusion has been the interiorisation of the Eurocentric world view by the Russian elites, which resulted in Europe being an essential Other for Russian identity construction. The vast literature on the topic (e.g. Thaden 1964, 1971, Walicki 1975, Greenfeld 1992: 189–274, Neumann 1996, 1999, Etkind 2011) seems to agree that at least since Peter I's reforms in the early eighteenth century, both the Russian debate and state policy have been oriented almost exclusively towards Europe, with alternative discourses being at most of marginal significance. As I will demonstrate below, this is also the case in contemporary Russia.

Speaking about the post-Soviet period in Russian history as a whole, it is relatively easy to prove the existence of normative dependency on the West. Russia's peripherality was painfully revealed in the revolution of the late 1980s–early 1990s. Moreover, the central ideological moment of the revolution consisted in accepting the country's backwardness and the need to catch up with the civilised world. This brief hegemony of the Westerniser discourse was powerful enough to delegitimise the Soviet regime and eventually to bring it down, as well as to initiate a 'transition' – a process that was (and remains) much more complex than simply a 'transition to democracy and market economy'.

In some of its key respects, the Russian transition was part of the 'third wave of democratisation', as described by Samuel Huntington (1991) and his followers. This conceptualisation is useful in as much as it puts Russia in a wider global context with crucial links to the more conventional postcolonial cases. At the same time, it suggests that the widespread criticism of the transition paradigm fully applies to the Russian case. Typically, this criticism questions transitological teleology (the image of all 'transition countries' making measurable

progress towards becoming Western-type democracies and doing so in accordance with uniform general laws), as well as the propensity of the transition paradigm to reduce politics to 'good governance' and thus to bracket off the people as the subject of democratic politics (Carothers 2002, Kapustin 2003, Chandler 2006, Koelble and Lipuma 2008).

Even though the concept of transition as such has only tangential significance for postcolonial theorising, it still enters the picture through a more general critique of the notion of development and in particular of the fact that developing countries are compelled "to refocus their previous attention on economic "development" toward a shift to "political development" characterized in the language of "democratic transition" and "governance"' (Edozie 2009: 1). This, in turn, is an aspect of the central postcolonial enterprise of challenging the Eurocentric outlook of Western political thought, which tends to universalise particular European and North American experience and disregard the structural impact of colonialism on the preconditions for democracy in the periphery (Koelble and Lipuma 2008). As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 41) puts it, with a reference to Spivak, the postcolonial subject 'can only be spoken for and spoken of by the transition narrative, which will always ultimately privilege the modern (that is, "Europe")'.

The Russian transition<sup>1</sup> was certainly deeply affected by Eurocentrism, both imposed from outside and, even more crucially, inherent in Russia's own identity politics as self-Orientalisation. In this sense, it consisted in the 'unworlding' of the Second World, which, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, might have produced even more radical silencing than the 'worlding' of the 'Third World'. Democratisation was generally accepted as a valid political goal, and the idea of democracy that most Russians shared implied reshaping Russia in the image and likeness of the West. The difference between Russia as a peripheral country and the Western core was dismissed in the 'unworlding' move; transition was reduced to straightforward Westernisation as a literal imitation of the West. However, as an effect of uneven and combined development, the revolutionary crisis led to a dramatic deterioration of economic circumstances for the vast majority of the population and a sharp rise in inequality. As Russia might have been moving closer to the Western model politically and institutionally (though even that can be subject to doubt), economically it plunged into an abyss that had very little in common with the rosy image of a consumerist paradise. Thus, dependence on the West in terms of the goals of societal development in the end contributed to the alienation, both from the West and from

the idea of democracy, which most Russians experienced towards the mid-1990s.

There is obviously a wide range of factors that affected the diverging outcomes of post-communist transitions. One unique structural feature of Russia's position needs to be specially highlighted: unlike other Central and East European countries, Russia did not have an unambiguously defined external Other that would have embodied its authoritarian past. While its neighbours in Europe could present their attempts to join the Western core as liberation from the Soviet empire, Russia was unable to veil its peripherality in such a manner. As a result, the subaltern experience of the 1990s tended to reinforce the imperial part of Russia's identity. Relying on such resources as nuclear power, the abundance of oil and gas and permanent membership of the UN Security Council, Putin's Russia assumed an increasingly assertive position on the international arena. At the same time, as this chapter will show, the dialectics of the subaltern and the imperial is still in operation and manifests itself very powerfully in the current conservative turn.

Thus, as the revolutionary tide abated, the long-established structure of subaltern imperial hegemonies and counter-hegemonies was reinstalled. The pro-Western excitement of 1991 was superseded by a more ambiguous attitude, which remained a consistent feature of Russia's relations with Western-dominated international institutions and, in the final analysis, of Russia's identity. This attitude remained Eurocentric but, as in the previous centuries (Greenfeld 1992: 222–74), was haunted by the feeling of resentment towards the West.

Putin himself started off on a rather Eurocentric note by declaring, just weeks before his first presidential election, that 'Russia is part of the European culture. And I cannot imagine my own country in isolation from Europe and what we often call the civilised world' (Putin 2000). By the end of the 1990s, Moscow had succeeded in accessing major Western-dominated organisations (the G8, the Council of Europe) while establishing formal cooperation with others (NATO, the EU). However, its membership in both the G8 and the Council of Europe remained incomplete: Russia did not take part in the regular meetings of the G8 finance ministers and still has to fully abolish the death penalty, which it is obliged to do as a Council of Europe member.<sup>2</sup> Despite the existence of the NATO-Russia Council, established in 2002, and the significant cooperation on Afghanistan, counterterrorism and other issues, relations with NATO remained strained, not least due to a gap between how both sides see Russia's status and role in international affairs (Pouliot 2010).

Ambiguity is of course typical of hegemonies: whereas any hegemony is contested, counter-hegemonic contestations have no other language to use than the language of hegemony and therefore tend to reproduce the very inequality that they oppose (Morozov 2013). Criticising the West for what Moscow sees as a discriminatory attitude is one of the most stable patterns in the Russian discourse, well documented in the literature (e.g. Neumann 1996, 2008, Morozov 2002, 2009). The doctrine of 'sovereign democracy', which admittedly concentrates on the key ideological reference points of the entire first decade of Putin's rule, was a typical counter-hegemonic endeavour. Unwilling to be disciplined by the Western hegemon in the context of democracy promotion, Moscow positioned itself as an advocate of a more 'democratic' world order, where sovereign equality of nations would be secured as the fundamental principle (Morozov 2008, Makarychev and Morozov 2011, Makarychev 2013). However, harsh rhetoric did little to release Russia from the structurally embedded and historically sedimented subaltern position.

In Chapter 3, I already illustrated Russia's material dependency on the global capitalist core by looking at the economic and trade relations between the European Union and Russia. While this inequality inevitably provokes resentment, it also buttresses the normative power which the EU undoubtedly has over Russia. The transfer of formal norms goes strictly in one direction: Russia undertook to amend its legislation to ensure compatibility with the EU's *acquis* in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, signed in 1994 and in force since 1997 (Kalinichenko 2014). In spite of the muffled, even if frequent, expressions of discontent, the one-way norm transfer is largely recognised as inevitable and even beneficial. During Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, this recognition has become more open with the introduction of 'Partnership for Modernisation' – a new framework which explicitly provides for the transfer of norms and best practices from the EU to Russia (Romanova and Pavlova 2014). Russia's participation in the Bologna Process, aimed at the standardisation of university education to promote competitiveness and pan-European academic exchange, has also been an obvious act of 'Europeanisation'. Despite being highly controversial domestically, the reforms were consistently pushed through, albeit with varying degrees of success, by successive governments since 2003 (Smolin 2009).

The Russian case thus provides strong evidence in favour of Thomas Diez's (2013) assertion that 'normative power Europe' (Manners 2002, see also Whitman 2013) must be understood as hegemony. It results

from the half-hearted acceptance by Russia of the European normative order as superior to its own, which leads to a constant tension between two conflicting impulses, to catch up and to preserve a unique identity. It is important to highlight that normative inequality is to a significant extent determined by the logic of uneven and combined development. In particular, the reason why Russia has to adopt EU technical and legal norms is due to the technological superiority of the West: as long as Western technologies have to be used anyway, it makes full sense to adopt EU technical standards and related norms instead of developing them independently. This is an indication that some aspects of normative dependency can be viewed as a consequence of technological rent discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly, the return to the global trade system, which began already during the Soviet era, implied that sooner or later Russia would have to seek membership in the World Trade Organisation (and finally obtain it in 2012). Needless to say, the conditions of entry were dictated by the strongest players, such as the United States and the EU (Zimmermann 2007, Connolly and Hanson 2012).

The phenomenon that arguably provides the best illustration of Russia's normative dependency is the widespread normalisation and normativisation of the West in the Russian discourse. It is not limited to statements expressing pro-Western and/or liberal attitudes. On the contrary, references to Western norms and practices are often used to legitimise the political choices of the most illiberal nature. The universality of the norms that are usually classified in Russia as Western was officially recognised in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept (FPC 2008) and repeated, with slightly changed phrasing, in the updated version approved by Putin in 2013. Claiming that 'cultural and civilizational diversity of the world becomes more and more manifest', the Concept nevertheless acknowledges that 'various values and models of development', which 'clash and compete against each other', are all 'based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy' (MID 2013).

Given the degree of normative dependency, one could have expected that Russia would eventually Europeanise in the same way as the countries of the 'New Europe', whose national projects after the end of the Cold War were reformatted as a 'return to Europe' and opened up to the disciplining pressure of the EU. In the Russian case, however, Europeanisation has been repeatedly deferred, resulting in counter-hegemonic resentment to what was perceived as illegitimate imposition of Western norms. The reason for this deferral has been the imperial legacy. Securing the influence it still had in the post-Soviet space and

cultivating relationships established during the Soviet era became a priority foreign policy task already by the mid-1990s (Trenin 2011).

In the 2000s, both the imperial part of Russian identity and the independent statehood of its Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) neighbours were consolidated, leading to multiple conflicts. Moscow waged several gas and oil 'wars' against Ukraine and Belarus in 2006–09, got the newly elected Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich to agree to the continued presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol and built the Nord Stream gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea to reduce the level of dependence on the transit countries (Sherr 2013). Even though the 2008 war with Georgia cannot be exclusively blamed on Russia's imperialism,<sup>3</sup> it definitely strengthened imperialist attitudes and elevated them into what came to be known as 'Medvedev's doctrine' – a declaration of Russia's 'privileged interests' in the regions that 'are home to countries with which we share special historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbours' (Medvedev 2008). As a consequence, even before the creation of the Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, the Kremlin clearly demonstrated its preference in favour of independent Russia-centred institutional designs over pan-European institutions dominated by the EU. Putin's (2011) programmatic article introducing the project of Eurasian integration sent a clear message that the countries of the CIS were welcome to integrate with Europe through the Eurasian Union, under Moscow's leadership – and not independently.

Even in these cases, however, Russia's position towards the West could hardly be described as outright confrontational. Thus, Derek Averre concludes his analysis of the EU and Russia's policies in what used to be called 'the shared neighbourhood' by saying that 'Moscow does not reject out of hand the normative basis of the "European project" and the partial adoption of EU standards of governance might in the longer term be incorporated into its policies towards the shared neighbourhood' (Averre 2009: 1710). Putin's Eurasian Union project was justified at the outset by references to the EU experience (Putin 2011). The creation of financial institutions under BRICS (a grouping bringing together Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is discursively constructed within Russia as a challenge to the Western-dominated economic order. Upon a closer look, however, all these initiatives are similar to the technocratic structures created in other regional contexts as part of global economic governance (Yedovina and Butrin 2014).

The same is valid for the most extreme cases of the August 2008 intervention in Georgia and the propaganda campaign against the Ukrainian revolution in 2014. A very careful arrangement of the war

against Georgia as a ‘peace enforcement operation’ modelled on the 1999 NATO campaign against Yugoslavia was yet another example of the hegemonic power of Western discourse (Morozov 2010b: 194–6). The Ukrainian protest, in turn, was presented by the Russian media as ‘a brown revolution’, a Nazi riot against the legitimate authorities trying to protect ordinary citizens (MID 2014). At the very least, both examples indicate that Russia felt it essential to justify its action with reference to internationally established norms.

In sum, throughout most of its history, post-Soviet Russia has been locked in a relationship with the West where the latter played a hegemonic role. All available mappings of Russian national identity demonstrate the Eurocentric nature of the existing discourses. Ted Hopf’s work is of particular importance here, due to its systematic treatment of sources, which include a wide range of non-policy-oriented materials. He finds that the entire discursive field is structured around the concept of modernity, with Europe and the West being the most important external Others, while the role of the historical Other is nearly monopolised by the USSR (Hopf 2002: 154–69, see also Hopf 2013). Russia’s self-colonisation – integration into the global capitalist order, promoted by the subaltern empire on behalf of the capitalist core – has been very comprehensive.

While one of the sources of Western hegemony is Russia’s subaltern position in the neo-liberal capitalist system, the other, paradoxically, is the imperial legacy. A dialectical dynamic between these two aspects of national identity seems to strengthen both dependency and ontological insecurity, leading to resentment and, eventually, antagonism. The reflexive perception of the dependent condition was perhaps best captured by one of the architects of the neo-liberal market reforms Anatoly Chubais (2003) in his description of future Russia as a ‘liberal empire’, whose mission is ‘to lock the ring’ of ‘the great democracies of the Northern hemisphere’. This suggestive formula combines the desire to belong to the hegemonic core and the tacit realisation that this status somehow is always beyond reach, the resentment to being treated as subaltern periphery and the celebration of the imperial legacy which endows Russia with its own *mission civilisatrice* and the feeling of greatness. I shall now turn to the analysis of contemporary developments in order to provide a detailed illustration of this point.

### **Putin’s paleoconservative turn**

In the Western debate, it is not uncommon to present Russia as the absolute Other of Europe or the West, an actor challenging European



normative order by promoting, and sometimes imposing, its own alternative based on radically different values. Examples range from Mitt Romney's description of Russia as 'America's no. 1 geopolitical foe' to scholarly concepts like the 'promotion of authoritarianism', which lump Russia together with such countries as Iran and Venezuela (Vanderhill 2013). A key role in this othering of Russia is played by the elites of many Central and East European countries, in particular the Baltic states (Mälksoo 2009, 2013).

The current nationalist and conservative turn in Russian politics at first glance seems to fit this image of a radical anti-Western Other and even to take it to the point of denying Russia's belonging to Europe (Krstev 2014). Indeed, this argument is now echoed by some Russian authors, who contend, in particular in the context of Moscow's recent offensive use of both soft and hard power, that 'Putin has prepared for a big global leap', which confronts the West with 'an absolutely new phenomenon, targeted not at restoring the old hegemony, but at creating a totally new one', 'a new Komintern' (A. Morozov 2013). A transition from 'pragmatic to ideological totalitarianism' (Medvedev 2014) has brought about 'a fundamental divergence of values' between Russia and the West (Rogov 2013).

It might seem that the new official discourse does indeed postulate a substantial difference between Western and non-Western values and takes it to the point of denying Russia's belonging to Europe (this has been indeed proclaimed by the Ministry of Culture in its draft 'Foundations of State Cultural Policy', see Izvestia 2014). If that were true, it would signify a major departure from the canon of Russian identity discourse, which, at least since the Slavophile-Westerniser controversy of the mid-nineteenth century, asserted Russia's Europeanness. Starting from Dostoyevsky, the nationalist tradition sees Russia's future as glorious and, in a way, more European than that of Western Europe (Wachtel 1994: 123–47, 2001: 59–60, see also Thaden 1964: 25–37, Walicki 1975, Neumann 1996). If this legacy were now to be discarded, it would imply a break at least with the normative dependence on the West, if not with the material peripherality.

Of course, one has to admit that the assertion of Russia's Europeanness by the classical intellectual tradition must not be interpreted literally. Its meaning is not straightforward: it demonstrates, on the one hand, the insecurity of Russia's European identity (only that which is subject to doubt needs to be constantly reaffirmed) and, on the other hand, the liminal, borderline position of both Russia in Europe and Europe as a signifier in the Russian discourse. When all these empirical and

theoretical observations are taken into account, one might indeed be forced to conclude that Russia's European identity, which has never been stable, now has been completely overtaken by its imperialist Self and that in the future Russia is likely to define itself primarily through the othering of the West, combined with attempts to re-establish control over the breakaway parts of the former empire.

At the same time, as we know from liminality theory, liminal positions, by virtue of their playing a key role in social transitions, generate a lot of decentring and subversive power (Mälksoo 2012, Rumelili 2012). Liminality by no means implies marginality and insignificance. This is certainly true for the Russia–Europe bond: while both identities are liminal within each other's discursive space, this is exactly what makes them so important for each other (cf. Morozov and Rumelili 2012).

Moreover, as powerfully argued by Chakrabarty (2000), negation of European colonialism in itself is a symptom of the subaltern condition and in no way can be interpreted as a sign of emancipation. On the contrary, radical nationalist and anti-colonial rhetoric typically uses the hegemonic matrix, while its main point boils down to the claim that the colonised are no less civilised than the colonisers. The absolute same pattern is revealed in the Russian conservative discourse, which uses the key nodal points of European modernity to present Russia as more European and spiritually superior to the decaying West.

The ideological transformation that resulted in the regime explicitly embracing conservative ideology was initiated by the wave of urban protests during the winter of 2011–12 (Lipman 2013). I will henceforth refer to this new, openly ideological political course as 'paleoconservatism', a term borrowed from the US context (Scotchie 1999). I find this term very appropriate not just because it highlights the international connections of this movement. It also helps to distinguish this traditionalist ideology from the oppositional conservatism of the previous decade, which has been described as 'new conservatism', 'left conservatism' (Prozorov 2005, 2009c) or 'neo-conservatism' (Senderov 2008). As pointed out by Aleksandra Novozhenova (2014), Russian neo-conservatives share definitional characteristics with their Western counterparts: they 'approve of "modernity" as the development of science and the growth of capitalist economy, but want politics to be understood pragmatically and to be freed from any utopian horizon, reduced to "rationally organised governance", while art would not step outside of its autonomous domain'. On the contrary, the paleoconservatives

(Novozhenova labels them *староконсерваторы* – literally, ‘old conservatives’) emphasise tradition and organic spirituality, and tend to politicise culture an instrument of ‘civilisational struggle’.

The new ideology was proclaimed in President Putin’s December 2012 address to the Federal Assembly. He famously deplored the shortage of ‘spiritual bonds [*духовных скреп*]... which have always, throughout our history, made us stronger and more powerful, which we have been always proud of’ (Putin 2012a, official translation modified). The term ‘spiritual bonds’ quickly established itself as a discursive reference point and came to be actively used by both the proponents of the regime and its critics. In 2013, the Presidential Administration even commissioned a study of ‘the depth and structure of the historical memory of the Russians’ in order to define ‘historical markers capable of performing the role of a spiritual bond’ (quoted in Vedomosti 2013a).

The image of the Russian nation as an organic community based on more than just civic identity was evident already in Putin’s pre-election article on inter-ethnic relations, where he for the first time embraced the notion of ethnic Russians as a ‘state-constitutive people’, *государствообразующий народ* (Putin 2012g), which had been advocated by ethnonationalists ever since 1990s. The essentialist view of national identity is very visibly present in one of the most significant ideological statements of the post-2012 period – Putin’s speech at the annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in September 2013. The speech abounds with expressions like ‘our nation’s cultural and spiritual codes’ and references to the body of the nation as ‘a living organism’ which is held together by a shared ‘genetic code’. Even though he rejected the possibility ‘to identify oneself only through one’s ethnicity or religion in such a large nation with a multi-ethnic population’, he still described Russia as ‘a state-civilisation, reinforced by the Russian people, Russian language, Russian culture, Russian Orthodox Church and the country’s other traditional religions’ (Putin 2013). Such explicit references to the leading role of the Russian people in nation building had not been typical of the official discourse before Putin’s third term. This testifies for a much more conservative and explicitly ideological attitude.

Translated into political practice, the search for ‘spiritual bonds’ prompts various measures aimed at fixing the existing social identities and ensuring the homogeneity of the Russian nation. This includes raising the political profile of the Russian Orthodox Church along with other ‘traditional religions’ (Solodovnik 2013, Verkhovsky 2013), fostering patriotism (mostly through endless reminders about the heroism

of the Soviet people during the Second World War) and strengthening traditional social institutions, among which the family is presented as absolutely paramount. Spilling over into the cultural sphere, it produces what Andrey Shental (2013) calls ‘Russia’s new cultural policy’:

Instead of the ‘inorganic’, ‘abstract and cubistic’ work of art, reflecting the split in the contemporary subject and ‘deciphering’ the reality, the Russian authorities offer us an ‘organic’ product in which, like in the mirror, the audience sees itself as unparted and the world as unequivocal.

The emphasis on traditional family and organic unity has security repercussions, too: as argued by Marlene Laruelle (2013: 3), recognising ideological differences is dangerous because ‘the Russian regime is designed specifically on denying divisions in the public space’ and thus presenting itself as acting on behalf of the entire nation. This leads to various repressive measures against what is perceived as subversive Western influences, in particular against the ‘propaganda of homosexuality’ (Kondakov 2014). While previous cases of criminal prosecution on moral grounds are best described as isolated instances, the repressive wave initiated by the *Pussy Riot* trial (Anderson 2013) seems to have acquired a systematic character.<sup>4</sup> At this point, the conservative turn merges into the new security discourse, which presents Western interventionism as an imminent threat to Russia and justifies repression against those who are perceived as ‘foreign agents’ (this aspect is analysed in Chapter 5). It thus has a clear foreign policy dimension, which in the recent years has been consolidated around the discursive nodal point denoted by the term ‘soft power’.

### ‘Spiritual bonds’ as a soft power resource

The Kremlin’s attempts to seal off domestic political, cultural and even biopolitical space are inevitably reflected on the foreign policy agenda, especially as Western observers express their concern about the potential effect of the new measures on the human rights situation in Russia. The ban on ‘gay propaganda’ had a particularly strong effect in the context of the Sochi Olympics (Gronskaya and Makarychev 2014). In the eyes of many supporters of Putin, the Western reaction justified the view that ‘Russophobe attitudes’, dominating in the global information space, prove the existence of ‘a constant effort to discredit the image of the country... to deliberately oppose a restoration of Russia’s position

in world affairs' (Hauer-Tiukarkina 2013: 96). Typically, this leads to the conclusion that 'aggression in the information space... has a detrimental effect on Russian domestic politics and foreign policy, and has to be opposed by measures to improve Russia's image abroad' (Malysheva 2013: 94).

These appeals were heeded by the authorities already in 2005–08, when the Kremlin launched the Russia Today TV channel (the official title has been later abbreviated to 'RT'), hired US agency, Ketchum, to take care of Russia's image abroad and created the *Russky mir* ('Russian World') foundation and the *Rossotrudnichestvo* – a state agency for cultural diplomacy (Kommersant 2013b). In December 2013, President Putin issued a decree creating the Russia Today information agency on the basis of *RIA Novosti*, a highly respected and relatively independent news agency, and the Voice of Russia radio station. The choice of person to lead the new agency left no doubts about its mission: it is directed by Dmitry Kiselev, a TV anchor notorious for his anti-Western, anti-liberal and homophobic stance (Zholobova 2013).

Starting from 2012, these efforts were framed as projecting 'soft power' – a term sanctioned by Putin in one of his pre-election articles (Putin 2012f) and recognised as an important foreign policy tool by the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept (MID 2013). In the academic literature, the opposition between hard and soft power was introduced by Joseph Nye as far back as 1990 (Nye 1990, see also Nye 2004). According to Nye, soft power operates through attraction rather than coercion, payment or manipulation and thus needs to be differentiated not just from economic power but also from propaganda. In his view, this is exactly the point that neither China nor Russia get, and both 'make the mistake of thinking that government is the main instrument of soft power' (Nye 2013).

While this view is shared by many Russian academics (Nye himself refers to Sergei Karaganov, see Karaganov 2009), the conceptual debate is of little concern for us here. Suffice it to say that in my view, the concept is fuzzy and inferior to the much more theoretically profound notion of hegemony. Hence, what I am interested in in this chapter is specifically the use of the term 'soft power' in the Russian official discourse, as a concept of practice whose presence can be read as a symptom of a certain condition Russian society finds itself in. More specifically, it reveals the dialectics of the subaltern and the imperial, which translates the feeling of normative inferiority and resulting vulnerability into a new assertiveness, manifesting itself in the attempts at soft power projection.

In his July 2012 speech at the meeting with the diplomatic corps, Putin defines soft power as being ‘all about promoting one’s interests and policies through persuasion and creating a positive perception of one’s country, based not just on its material achievements but also its spiritual and intellectual heritage’ (Putin 2012b). In the pre-election article, the concept is clearly put in the context of the Arab Spring, which is presented as a result of malevolent manipulation and illegitimate use of soft power resources for ‘direct intervention in the domestic politics of sovereign states’ (Putin 2012f). This defensive attitude, which derives from the feeling of inequality and insecurity, remained a prominent feature of the Russian discourse, to resurface during the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. Throughout this period, Western hegemony was seen as overwhelming, and it was not uncommon to present Russia as ‘an externally governed country, a colony’, whose ‘vassal status’ is inscribed even in its Basic Law. Such was the interpretation by a United Russia MP of Article 15 of the Constitution, which stipulates supremacy of international agreements over domestic laws (Fedorov 2013).

The anti-colonial anxiety tends to strengthen the imperial elements of Russia’s identity. It is at this point that the conservative turn and the concern over Russia’s image come together by highlighting traditional family values as Russia’s key soft power resource. In structural terms, the argument is nothing new. Complaints about Western Europe having abandoned true European values and succumbed to US imperialism, Islamisation or radical secularism, while Russia kept standing as a bulwark of Christian European values, have been heard ever since the 1990s (Morozov 2002, 2009: 503–23). The promotion of traditional family values fits into the earlier official – and much more moderate – doctrine of Russia’s soft power as ‘the defence of the right of the particular’.<sup>5</sup> It is genealogically linked with the concept of ‘sovereign democracy’ and emphasises every nation’s sovereign right to its own definition of universal values. As already pointed out, the universality of values, combined with the plurality of the ways in which different civilisations achieve them, was a principle clearly formulated in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept (FPC 2008) and repeated in the 2013 version of the document (MID 2013).

The same way of thinking is also manifest in a programmatic article by Konstantin Kosachev, whose appointment in 2012 as the head of *Rossotrudnichestvo* indicated the transformation of the latter from an agency taking care of the Russians living abroad into a key institution responsible for the projection of Russia’s soft power. Having asserted that universal values ‘cannot, at the conceptual level, to be considered

someone's property – for instance, that of the West – and an individual characteristic of someone's soft power', Kosachev goes on to flesh out the argument:

With the disappearance of global ideological unipolarity we can talk about the unity of fundamental values for most peoples, but at the same time about differences in their individual implementation, which is conditioned by national, historical and other specificity . . . . Russia is capable of offering to others realistic models for the solution of common and individual problems, applicable specifically to their countries, and developed in close and honest cooperation.

(Kosachev 2012: 42–3)

This point is developed by the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, who in fact engages in classical romanticist universalisation of particularity (Greenfeld 1992: 266–7, see also Riasanovsky 1959). In a way similar to Fichte in Germany and Aksakov in nineteenth-century Russia, he claimed that Russianness was synonymous with humanity: 'The "universal sympathy", per Dostoyevsky, of our culture, contrary to [Western] multiculturalism, safeguards the shared cultural space, a uniform language of cultural dialogue . . . . An artist – regardless of his ethnicity – became part of the Russian culture at the moment when he accepted the common system of values, enshrined in our culture, in our legacy' (Medinsky 2014). This and similar statements complete the typical cycle, in which subaltern resentment is being universalised into something that looks like a much more global imperialist project, prepared to embrace any genuinely particular identity.

The emphasis on family values and open homophobia might indicate a new turn in this discourse, which targets concrete Others and therefore is more explicitly politicised. However, the effect of this politicisation, as well as its novelty, remains limited to the domestic sphere, where it might indeed manifest the end of the post-communist suspension of politics and a much clearer ideological positioning of the regime (more on that in Chapter 5). It is my contention that it does not indicate an end to Russia's normative dependence on the West. On the contrary, this dependence might now be even more profound, and the subaltern side of Russian imperialism even more visible.

### **Anti-Western soft power as a postcolonial phenomenon**

In a recent essay, Andrey Tsygankov (2013) emphasises the 'distinctiveness' of Russian values as a factor preventing Russia from fully

cooperating with the West, which in turn necessitates Russia gaining soft power of its own. In contrast, I argue that Russia's search for soft power is driven by normative dependency, resulting in an inability to come up with any distinct alternative ideological platform. As a matter of fact, even the use of the term 'soft power' in the official discourse is an act of mimicry, an attempt to catch up with the West. It is interesting to note that in both academic and political discourse, 'soft power' normally functions as a trendier equivalent of the older term 'political technologies'.<sup>6</sup> The new term allegedly describes something that gives the West an advantage over Russia, something that Russia must acquire in order to catch up with more technologically advanced countries. This argument follows an established pattern of self-Orientalisation, which is rooted in the material fact of dependence on imported technologies.

In more general terms, Russia continues to be obsessed with the desire to prove its belonging to Europe: it seems that Russian imperialism remains firmly tied to the idea of civilisation, defined in a decidedly Eurocentric way. It brings back to life the Slavophile world view, in which the West was condemned as excessively materialist and nihilist, while Russia's mission was to defend true European values, 'to tell Europe... who she really was' (Laruelle 2014a, see also Thaden 1964: 31–2). More broadly, the new imperialist turn re-invokes the familiar opposition between 'false' and 'true' Europe, which Iver Neumann (1996) traces back to the emergence of Muscovy as an independent international actor. In this construction, 'true' Europe is a projection of Russia's identity, while 'false' Europe serves as a wastebasket for those elements of European reality that Russia cannot put up with.

As an illustration, in one of the early texts proposing to base Russia's soft power on traditional family values, the Russian government's official daily was constructing the linkage also on the other side of the 'us' versus 'them' divide, between the new and old embodiments of 'false' Europe:

At a dance festival in Estonia, the organisers offered young people between 12 and 20 years of age to perform as gay mosquitos, hedgehogs afraid of piercing condoms with their quills, sexually obsessed squirrels and drunken bears not without interest in male sex.

(Shestakov 2012)

Estonia, along with the other Baltic states, is of course a long-time embodiment of 'false' Europe due to the alleged violations of the rights of the local Russian speakers (Morozov 2004, 2009: 382–416). Having thus demonstrated the degree of the moral decay reigning at the heart



of 'false' Europe, the author then contrasted this with the unspoiled spirit of 'true' Europe:

In spite of large-scale propaganda of the non-traditional family values, most inhabitants of the Old World do not live in accordance with these new laws . . . Russia, which is a tough and uncompromising defender of exactly these traditional values, can, in the end, turn out for the Europeans to be the most attractive example of a state capable of resisting the post-Christian trends.

(Shestakov 2012)

The antagonisation of the 'false' Europe translates into a construction of a 'true' Europe centred on Russia. The more radically the West is othered by this discourse, the more it strives to anchor Russia's identity in Europe by redefining the latter. Note that the link to Europe is preserved even in the most extreme, openly propagandistic texts that flatly accuse all Russia's opponents of being Nazis, Russophobes, homosexuals and paedophiles at once. Such texts still keep emphasising Russia's role as 'true' Europe and referring to the fundamental international documents such as the European Convention for Human Rights (e.g. FBR 2014).

There is ample textual evidence for the paramount significance of the Western Other, mainly represented by the figure of 'false' (Western, and therefore morally inferior) Europe, for the construction of the body of the Russian nation. One of the most characteristic statements comes from the Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov:

Unfortunately, a sizeable part of the Russians wants to emulate the Europeans, their way of life, even though, largely speaking, most Europeans have no culture and no morals. They welcome everything non-human. Same-sex marriages are a normal thing for them . . . I do not want to be a European. I want to be a citizen of Russia, and [I want] that our peoples restore their culture, customs, traditions. This is the basis for a strong Russia . . . Whichever modern technologies we might have, there will be no future without patriotism and spirituality.

(quoted in Yeliseev 2013)

Kadyrov's precarious position as the pro-Kremlin leader of an ethnic republic that waged a separatist war slightly more than a decade ago and whose population is the primary target of popular xenophobia makes

him a particularly representative speaker for Putin's regime as a whole, rather than for any particular faction such as the Orthodox Church or the oil lobby. It is worth noting that the Other is presented in his intervention in a very concrete way, through the reference to same-sex marriages, which illustrate Europe's alleged inhumanity. At the same time, the values on which the Russian political community is supposed to be based are referred to in abstract terms: 'culture, customs, traditions', 'patriotism and spirituality'. Saying anything more specific would mean running the risk of being accused of either promoting his group's particular identity or, on the contrary, betraying it for the sake of being holier than Putin.

This reveals a predicament faced by the entire paleoconservative project: the translation of subaltern resentment into an imperialist pursuit of soft power is a purely negative exercise, which does not in and by itself enable Russia to present a substantial alternative to Western neoliberal hegemony. As in the case of Russian common sense explored by Hopf (2013), the rejection of hegemonic values is not matched by any positive agenda. As it turns out, 'traditional family values' is an empty signifier that legitimises repression against the internal Other, but keeps retreating in the background as soon as someone tries to convert negation into affirmation. When Russian hawks present their proposals to support 'normal' families, it usually implies penalising the 'freaks' – banning adoptions by same-sex families, taxing childless individuals, increasing the state fee for divorce and so on. In particular, as Cai Wilkinson (2013: 6) points out, homophobia serves as a proxy for traditional values. Affirmative measures either had been introduced much earlier (e.g. the so-called maternity capital)<sup>7</sup> or remain at the level of highly controversial proposals – such as the proposal put forward by a State Duma Committee to encourage families of several generations to live together in one household (Komitet 2013). In the final analysis, all these campaigns boil down to defending Russia's 'sexual sovereignty' (Baunov 2013) against Western subversion, rather than to promoting any particular vision of good society.

It is therefore hardly possible to classify Russian paleoconservatism as fundamentalism in Shmuel Eisenstadt's (1999) terms, as a Jacobin movement that puts forward a holistic vision of radical social transformation, which is supposed to result in the creation of new man and new society. What Russian paleoconservatives do share with Muslim and other fundamentalists is 'a preoccupation with modernity. It is their frame of reference' (Eisenstadt 2000: 20, see also Göle 2000). However, in the Russian case, modernity and civilisation are understood in an entirely

Eurocentric way: as we have just seen, there is hardly any positive vision behind the aggressively negative anti-Western façade.

At the same time, while Laruelle (2013: 4) is right to point out that moral conservatism of contemporary Putinism is 'primarily a meta-narrative' rather than a set of positive policy goals, she probably takes it too lightly when she claims: 'It can be stated without deeply impacting social practices. It is therefore compatible with the very liberal mores of Russian society'. This was probably the case until the outbreak of the protests in 2011. Back then, it was indeed possible to 'speak of Putin's reign of pure synchrony and structure in terms of *absolute conservatism*, which . . . has dispensed with the substantive object of conservation and instead articulates itself as pure form or style, which can be put into play in any context whatsoever' (Prozorov 2009a: 73). The political crisis at home, followed by the Ukrainian revolution, exacerbated the feeling of insecurity, which has been a constant of Russian identity politics ever since the Soviet collapse. While it still did not result in any consistent positive agenda, the negative effort, aimed at eliminating the pro-Western 'fifth column', certainly intensified. Even though the new laws banning 'immoral' practices have not yet been used in any massive way, they create the basis for selective justice: by randomly punishing a few individuals, the state scares the rest of society into passive obedience. There is little doubt that paleoconservatism does have a repressive impact on Russian society.

The puzzle of this negative predisposition can only partly be resolved by a reference to the poststructuralist theoretical contention that negativity and antagonism are essential attributes of politics (Mouffe 1999b, 2005, Prozorov 2011). The Schmittean logic of antagonism cannot grasp the fundamentally hybrid nature of Russian conservative anti-Westernism. By grounding its every move in the Eurocentric normative order, Russian paleoconservatism abuses and inverts the hegemonic vocabulary but makes no attempt at transcending or abandoning it. Those speaking on behalf of the 'native' (i.e. the 'genuine', traditional Russia) entangle themselves in the Master-Slave dialectics, but as suggested by both post-foundational (Coole 2000, Prozorov 2009b, Magun 2014a) and postcolonial authors (Bhabha 2005, Jabri 2014), the Slave cannot overcome slavery by killing the Master (although even that is hardly realistic at this stage). 'The fantasy of the native', Bhabha (2005: 63–4) writes, 'is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging* anger'. To a no lesser extent than Chakrabarty's 'Indian history', the Russian quest for authenticity 'remains a mimicry of a certain "modern" subject of "European" history

and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure. The transition narrative will always remain “grievously incomplete” (Chakrabarty 2000: 40).

The fatal incompleteness of this narrative, one of the transition to a perfectly self-contained European nation, a dream better than the European reality, consists in the fact that its legitimacy needs to be sanctioned externally – by that very West which is antagonised and admired in the same discursive move. Normalisation of the West, highlighted above as a persistent feature of Russian identity politics, has remained and even strengthened with intensified securitisation. It is an indispensable element of the Putinite reaction, starting from the early attempts to crack down on grassroots activism in the aftermath of the 2011–12 protests and all the way down to the intervention in Ukraine.

Thus, the 2012 law compelling all NGOs that receive funding from foreign sources and engage in any political activities to register as ‘foreign agents’ was presented as modelled on the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (Sidiakin 2012). The restrictions on the freedom of assembly were widely justified by references stating ‘similar laws’ existed in West Europe and North America (Putin 2012a, see also RIA Novosti 2012). The bill introducing criminal sanctions for insulting religious feelings was presented in August 2012, against the background of the ongoing *Pussy Riot* trial, with repeated reminders that similar laws exist in Western Europe, in particular in Germany and Austria (Kuzmenkova et al. 2012). Characteristically, the next day after the *Pussy Riot* verdict, the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs issued a special statement citing both countries’ Criminal Codes (MID 2012). The criminalisation of the ‘rehabilitation of Nazism’ was accompanied by references to laws against denial of Nazi crimes that exist in West European countries (e.g. Bocharova 2014).

Same ambivalence is characteristic of Russia’s attempts to justify the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. While this move did indeed signal a new determination to break away from the constraints of Western-dominated European order, it can hardly be described as uncompromising and unambiguous. On the contrary, Russian authorities went to great lengths to anchor their actions in the existing normative order, while refusing to admit any facts on the ground that this could have had direct legal consequences. Thus, the intervention was presented as justified by the need to protect the Crimean population, and especially the Russian speakers, against ‘fascists’ and other radicals; at the same time, the very fact of the intervention was denied by claiming that the troops deployed in Crimea were actually ‘local self-defence units’.

In the meantime, Russia brought the question of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian Supreme Rada before the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, with little hope to succeed (Ivanov and Samokhina 2014, Kommersant 2014).

It also needs to be emphasised that in spite of the efforts of some intellectuals, like Vladimir Maliavin (e.g. Maliavin 2013), who have for a long time advocated adding a distinct Asian dimension to Russian identity and embracing China as Russia's genuine partner, this has proven a mission impossible. China remains too unfamiliar and even threatening (Shlapentokh 2007, Laruelle 2012). Similarly, the increase in the number of labour migrants from Central Asia is perceived by most Russians as an intrusion. In the end, as Laruelle (2010, 2014a) concludes, even as Russian nationalists criticise the West, they still believe that Russia's identity is fundamentally European.

It is therefore not surprising that the labelling of Russia as 'the largest Eurasian power' in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept (FPC 2008), which seemed to indicate a move away from Europe, did not make it to the 2013 version of the document (MID 2013). The loud-mouthed declarations that 'Russia is not Europe', such as the one by the Ministry of Culture's draft of the 'Foundations of State Cultural Policy' (Izvestia 2014), must be read not as indicating the end of Russia's modernisation (Fedyukin 2014) but as a claim to the ownership of the 'classical European art and classical European values':

Perhaps we will see Russia playing the role of the last guardian of European culture, Christian values and genuinely European civilisation . . . . In value terms the West is now turning into its opposite, and Russia has to culturally defend itself against the 'anti-Europe', in order to preserve . . . Shakespeare without paedophilia and *The Little Prince* without homosexual 'plastique'.

(Medinsky 2014)

Thus, as Grigory Revzin (2014) points out, the slogan 'Russia is not Europe' is actually meant to articulate Russia's identity within that of 'true' Europe:

In the context of Putin's idea of conservatism, a different thesis would be appropriate – namely, 'Europe is not Europe'. What the President does is setting off traditional European values – Christian, social, the values of progress and civic duty – against contemporary ideas of multiculturalism and tolerance. That is to say, it is in Russia

where genuine Europe has remained intact, whereas Europe itself has developed in some wrong way.

This Eurocentric attitude is particularly obvious in the appeals to traditional family values, which lie at the core of Russia's soft power as it is asserted by the paleoconservatives. The opposition between 'true', civilised Europe and its false decadent double was very visibly present in Putin's speech at the 2013 Valdai Club meeting, which is widely read as a presentation of the new, explicitly ideological stance (e.g. Laruelle 2013). The familiar theme of Russia's organic multiculturalism is overshadowed by a much more aggressive traditionalist stance, centred on homophobia. Thus, Putin claims that '[i]n Europe and some other countries so-called multiculturalism is in many respects a transplanted, artificial model that is now being questioned, for understandable reasons. This is because it is based on paying for the colonial past'. In Russia, on the contrary, genuine 'multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity' live 'in our historical consciousness, in our spirit and in our historical makeup. Our state was built in the course of a millennium on this organic model' (Putin 2013).

The topic of Russia's natural diversity, however, comes only towards the end of the speech and is eclipsed by an earlier, much more powerful statement with strong biopolitical overtones:

We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan.

The excesses of political correctness have reached the point where people are seriously talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote paedophilia. People in many European countries are embarrassed or afraid to talk about their religious affiliations . . . . And people are aggressively trying to export this model all over the world. I am convinced that this opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis.

(Putin 2013)

It seems that Putin himself strongly believes in the powerful negative effect that non-traditional sexual orientations have on the organic

growth of the nation, which he seeks to promote. At least, this is indicated by his quite emotional response to Gerhard Mangott's question about the law banning the 'propaganda of homosexuality', asked at the same meeting. Characteristically, in his response Putin again felt compelled to refer to the West, wrongly alleging that homosexuality 'is illegal in some US states' (Putin 2013), in an attempt to prove that Russia does not deviate from a certain universal (but in fact, hegemonic) norm.

While presidential statements by their very nature have to be somewhat more reserved and diplomatic, this is certainly not the case when it comes to propaganda on the state-controlled TV channels. Kiselev, director of RT and one of the main faces behind Russia's soft power offensive, became famous thanks to his outburst in an April 2012 TV talk show about LGBT rights, asserting that gays 'must be prohibited from donating blood, sperm, and their hearts, in case of a road accident, must be buried or incinerated. As unsuitable for continuation of anyone's life' (quoted in Zholobova 2013). Yet, even for Kiselev, the natural strategy to defend his statements is to present them as rooted in the Eurocentric concept of civilisation. In a later interview, he claimed that preventing homosexuals from donating blood or organs 'is a state policy in the United States, a state policy in Japan, a state policy of the EU countries, a state policy in the Muslim countries, practically of the entire world'. Consequently, he declared that he was not ashamed of his statement: 'What for? I am with the entire civilised world in this case. And I want Russia to move along the path of civilisation' (Echo Moskvy 2013a). The repeated references to the 'civilised world' are especially revealing here: even if in some cases they are made with tongue in cheek, the irony is not meant to critique or subvert the Eurocentric paradigm but rather to invert it by presenting Russia as more civilised than the West.

Russia is hardly unique in its othering of the Western core. Similar discourses are present across Central and Eastern Europe and the wider post-communist region, and they are, to a varying extent, balanced with normative dependency. What puts Russia in a category of its own is not the dynamics of identity but rather the forces of antagonism. Due to its position as the heir of the Soviet Union (and to some extent also of the Russian empire), Russia is itself othered by the 'old' and especially by the 'new' West. Former Cold War adversaries have never ceased to suspect the new Russia of lingering imperial ambitions, these suspicions recently being strengthened by Russia's increasingly vocal opposition to the hegemonic position of the West in world affairs and its imperialist policies in the post-Soviet space. In Central and Eastern Europe, the othering of Russia is even more intense, and it typically produces a

stronger Western and 'European' (i.e. pro-EU) identity (Mälksoo 2013). The anti-EU parties, on the contrary, tend to be pro-Russian, while coexistence of radical nationalist and anti-Russian rhetoric is relatively rare (Political Capital 2014). All of these combinations manifest postcolonial hybridity in the extremely complex field of multiple imperial legacies being variously re-worked by conflicting narratives. Eurocentrism, however, remains a nearly universal framework, with 'civilisation' as a key nodal point for all existing articulations of national identity.

Apart from structural parallels, international connections influence Russia's quest for soft power in a much more direct manner. As Laruelle (2013: 2) notes, by explicitly embracing conservative ideology, 'for the first time since the Soviet collapse, the country is participating in transnational debates that stir Western public opinion'. The Kremlin often joins forces with the Vatican in defending Europe's 'Christian legacy' at various international fora and used Russian membership in the UN Human Rights Council to push through three resolutions stipulating that the 'traditional values of mankind' must serve as the foundation for human rights (Wilkinson 2013: 5). It also actively cooperates with the US-based World Congress of Families, whose eighth meeting is due to take place in Moscow in September 2014. Putin's Russia is regularly praised in the materials published by the Congress for refusing to promote juvenile justice (Parfentiev 2013: 240), restricting abortion and other 'victories for the natural family and human rights' (WCF 2013, see also Laruelle 2014a). Prominent anti-gay activists from other countries, in particular the United States, regularly get official invitations to Russia. One of these notorious figures, the founder of the US-based Family Research Institute, Paul Cameron, spoke at a State Duma roundtable on family values, in October 2013 (Seddon and Feder 2013).

In a certain sense, it might be argued that by embracing conservatism, Putin has finally managed to complete the imperial mission outlined by Chubais in 2003 and to achieve at least partial recognition across 'the great democracies of the Northern hemisphere'. 'Conservatism' figures in this context as a respectable name which allows the party of power to link its policies both to the classical West European tradition and to the contemporary European political landscape, presenting United Russia as a 'normal' conservative party like many of those in power in Europe (Nagornykh 2014). In reality, its position is of course much more marginal: thus, Putin has been welcomed by the leader of the US paleoconservative movement Patrick J. Buchanan as 'one of us' (Buchanan 2013) and widely praised by the European and US far right (Laruelle 2014a: 3–4) but not by any mainstream conservative leaders.



In any case, this partial recognition hardly indicates an end to normative dependency: on the contrary, not only do Russian conservatives follow the lead of their Western brothers-in-arms, but they also actively seek their approval and gladly accept the undisputed moral authority of the West when it can be relied upon to justify their own policies. In other words, Russia's subaltern imperial position translates into a nearly impossible, self-contradictory political framework: a political action is only seen as legitimate if it is directed against the West (or at least demonstrates Russia's independence from the West) *and* fits the 'universal' norm (defined and upheld by Western hegemony) *at the same time*.

### **The Russian peasant as a non-presence**

Trying to explain the unexpected popularity of the restrictive legislation associated with Putin's turn to conservatism, Viktor Martyanov (2014: 91) connects it with 'the Russian economy having rolled back to the peripheral position in the capitalist world-system, which naturally reduced the potential social base of the adherents of modern values'. While I do believe that the underlying dynamic of uneven and combined development must be taken into account while analysing these short-term developments, I would not see it as their immediate cause. In my assessment, the Kremlin openly embraced conservative ideology not because there are fewer liberals in Russia now than in the 1990s, but rather because those liberals are no longer considered as a potential audience, having been discursively repositioned as a fifth column acting on behalf of hostile outside forces. There are certainly many additional factors at play here: in the final analysis, each example I give in this chapter deals with a political decision that follows more than one logic of appropriateness. Putin's regime relies on a broad coalition of political forces, from the security services and the oil lobby to loyalist intelligentsia, who push for substantially different political outcomes. As Russia's reaction to the Western sanctions in the wake of the annexation of Crimea demonstrates, there is also enough awareness of the continuing dependency on, and weakness in the face of, the West. The Kremlin is therefore careful to present any policy moves in a language that would appeal to the broadest domestic and international audience (excluding, once again, the pro-Western liberals within the country).

All of these considerations are important, but my point in this chapter is not to provide explanations for short-term developments. Rather, what I want to highlight is that each case unfolds against the same

discursive background and thus is fundamentally conditioned by the logic of hybridity. The key element of this background is the acceptance of the hegemonic normative order as superior and even unquestionable: this is evident even in those actions which on the surface strive to establish a higher moral ground for Russia or even to directly confront the West. The problem for all these moves is that this higher moral ground has to be established within the limits of the international, which, in Vivienne Jabri's terms, is 'pre-scripted' by the West (2014: 377–78).

The fact that the moral authority of the West is simultaneously vehemently opposed and upheld by Russian paleoconservatism, once again, confirms its belonging to the centuries-old intellectual tradition of asserting Russianness in front of the Western mirror. The hegemonic nature of this predicament is eloquently characterised by Greenfield:

unable to tear themselves away from the West, to eradicate, to efface its image from their consciousness, and having nothing to oppose to it, [the Russian intellectuals] defined it as the anti-model and built an ideal image of Russia in direct opposition to it. Russia was still measured by the same standards as the West (for it defined the Western values as universal), but it was much better than the West. For every Western vice it had a virtue... and if it was impossible to see these virtues in the apparent world of political institutions and cultural and economic achievements, this was because the apparent world was the world of appearances and shadows, while the virtues shined in the world of the really real – the realm of the spirit.

(1992: 255)

Looking at the paleoconservative discourse from a postcolonial perspective, in turn, reveals its fundamental hybridity. It is produced at the point of encounter between the Master and the Slave where the Slave engages in 'colonial mimicry as the affect of hybridity – at once a mode of appropriation and resistance, from the disciplined to the desired' (Bhabha 2005: 172). In his resentment, the Slave can mimic, distort or even invert the dominant norm; what he cannot do is establish any moral authority of his own that would not need the Master's sanction to be credible. Regardless of the different cultural and geographical context, as well as the level of analysis, Russia's search for organic unity comes surprisingly close to the phenomena which, according to Achille Mbembe, define 'the postcolonized subject' – the 'baroque practices fundamentally ambiguous, fluid, and modifiable even where there are clear, written, and precise rules' (Mbembe 2001: 129). The effect of these

practices is also similar to Mbembe's findings in his research on the interaction between the authoritarian regimes and the people in postcolonial Africa: 'the practices of those who command and those who are assumed to obey are so entangled as to render both powerless' (2001: 133).

This fundamental similarity goes beyond superficial parallels: rather, we are talking about the postcolonial situation replicating itself in various places and at different levels – domestic as well as international. Indeed, as Mbembe notes himself referring to the baroque phenomena he focuses on, 'there is nothing specifically African about this' (2001: 108–9). It is perhaps not just a mere coincidence that Mbembe quotes Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin as his main source of inspiration. Mbembe considers Bakhtin to have been wrong in attributing these subversive practices exclusively to the dominated. In his opinion,

the real inversion takes place when, in their desire for a certain majesty, the masses join in the madness and clothe themselves in cheap imitations of power to reproduce its epistemology, and when power, in its own violent quest for grandeur, makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence.

(2001: 133)

It is indicative that similar carnivalesque elements have been observed on both sides of the social divide that came into sight during the 2011–12 political crisis. On the one hand, a few authors have written about their conspicuous presence in the aesthetics of the mass protests against electoral fraud (e.g. Moroz 2012). The participants of these protests mostly belonged to the urban middle class, but their political identification was with 'the people' (Magun 2014b). On the other hand, a similar pattern is registered by Viktor Martyanov (2014: 92) in the functioning of the ruling elites:

the Russian elites are neither backward nor peripheral by themselves. On the contrary, in their personal, particular strategies they are effectively included in the global modernity. Nevertheless, the rules of the game, market exchanges and modern values that are accepted by the Russian elite in the external space do not apply to the domestic political order, where under the continued predominance of gift trade and distributional... principles of social exchange (K. Polanyi) they acquire imitational, carnivalesque character, which eliminates their original meaning.

This quote can be interpreted along the lines of the internal colonisation paradigm: the elites are part of the Eurocentric global order and behave like colonisers in 'their' country. However, the inversion that is signalled by the departure from the 'original meaning' suggests a wider reading: the neo-liberal order permeates the entire social body, but due to the impact of uneven and combined development its operation in the peripheral spaces is not quite the same as within the core.

Viewed in this light, the Kremlin's pursuit of soft power based on traditional values emerges as the other side of 'the double bind' which locks Russia into the transition narrative. The first coil of this bind is explicitly Eurocentric: it is evident in the almost total acceptance of the superiority of the Western norm, as described above. The second convolution, however, are the 'maneuvers . . . within the space of the mimetic', which celebrate the imaginary authenticity of the native: the promotion of traditional values both as a 'spiritual bond' inside and as a soft power resource in foreign affairs. The aim of these manoeuvres is, in Chakrabarty's words,

to represent the 'difference' and the 'originality' of the 'Indian' [or, in our case, of the 'Russian'], and it is in this cause that the anti-historical devices of memory and the antihistorical 'histories' of the subaltern classes are appropriated . . . Much like Spivak's 'subaltern' (or the anthropologists' peasant who can only have a quoted existence in a larger statement that belongs to the anthropologist alone), this subject can only be spoken for and spoken of by the transition narrative, which will always ultimately privilege the modern (that is, 'Europe').  
(2000: 40–1)

The key difference between Chakrabarty's Indian peasant (and Spivak's subaltern) and my authentic Russian is that the former does possess certain 'antihistorical devices of memory' and thus some authentic existence. At least, this is what is claimed by Chakrabarty (see also Seth 2013b: 146–50). The multiple modernities literature agrees that local political tradition, combined with colonial influences, played an important role in shaping Indian modernity (Kaviraj 2000). Similarly, while Islamic fundamentalist movements are described as inherently modern, they are shaped by interaction and cross-fertilisation between Islam and modernity, both being originally rooted in distinct historical experiences (Göle 2000).

In contrast, the Russia which is being constructed in the paleoconservative discourse is not connected with any living memories outside

of the space of the mimetic. It is quite possible that such living memories can still be found on the margins of the Russian society – in particular if one looks at the non-ethnic Russian periphery such as the North Caucasus. Indeed, the Chechen warrior has a very visible presence in the space of Russian politics and culture. However, this figure most certainly cannot replace the Russian peasant as the bearer of genuine Russianness in opposition to Eurocentric modernity. First of all, in Derluigiuan's (2005) world-systemic analysis of the peripheral revolt in the North Caucasus, far from being a manifestation of pre-modern consciousness, it is a product of colonial modernisation. As pointed out above, the multiple modernities literature seems to concur in its description of fundamentalism as a modern phenomenon. On a broader note, in his apology of 'other worlds of knowledge', Sanjay Seth (2013b: 147–8) also acknowledges that even though modern knowledge 'is never homologous with the entire world', 'the non-Western world has been fundamentally reconstituted and refabricated' by modernisation.

Secondly, even if 'modern knowledge' overlooks a certain authentic non-ethnic Russian tradition due to its Eurocentric logic, this tradition would belong to a totally different space compared to where the Russian peasant is supposedly found. Politically and culturally, it would be constructed in opposition to Russian imperialism, which in this case would be no different from the Western. Moreover, everything 'non-Russian' tends to be forcefully othered by paleoconservatives. The definitive element of 'tradition' for them is loyalty to the state, and therefore any genuine anti-historical memory would by definition be excluded.

As for the really existing disenfranchised peasants and workers living in out of the way corners of the empire, even if they are the bearers of some genuine subaltern Russianness, the neo-liberals in the Kremlin could not care less about its existence and content. Moreover, as I will show in Chapter 5, this anti-historical memory is deliberately silenced, because in the Eurocentric outlook of the Russian autocracy the mysterious 'Russian soul' contains huge destructive potential (due to its propensity to 'the Russian revolt – pointless and merciless'). As Greenfeld puts it in her characterisation of the authoritarian nature of nineteenth-century Russian nationalism, '[t]he spirit of the nation resided in the "people", but rather paradoxically, was revealed through the medium of the educated elite, who, apparently, had the ability to divine it' (1992: 261). In doing that, the educated elite invariably reinvent the image of Mother Russia as a negation of the West, which makes the former a mirror image of the latter.

If one takes the positive existence of Chakrabarty's peasant as the guardian of anti-historical memories for an established fact, the corollary would be that the Russian case is rather unique. As my analysis indicates, this figure is a discursive representation of an empty spot: the Russian peasant is nothing more than a mirror image of the West, unrelated to any genuine anti-historical being 'out there' in the world. The Russian peasant as a positive presence might still linger somewhere on the margins, but he would be a true subaltern in Spivak's sense, with his concerns and expectations having absolutely no discursive representation. Instead, the educated elite create the peasant as they see him: a patriarchal savage who is naturally inclined to healthy patriotism but can be easily seduced if left without supervision. This image is firmly rooted in the only tradition in which the Russian paleoconservatives feel comfortable operating – the tradition originating in the European romanticism of the early nineteenth century and presently maintained by the European and North American far right. In this sense, Putinite paleoconservatism envisages Russia as an alternative modernity – a powerful nation-state which protects a certain set of values, firmly rooted in the popular culture. The negation of the West, which circumscribes the empty spot of genuine Russianness, is also borrowed from the same romanticist tradition: in its anti-European zeal, Russia remains an integral part of Europe with no independent normative resources to rely upon.

Russia's condition, thus diagnosed, suggests several important consequences for the theoretical and political debate. First of all, it seems to invite the postcolonial studies literature to revisit the figure of the peasant in view of the Russian experience. The Russian case offers unqualified support for Spivak's initial pessimistic assertion that 'the subaltern cannot speak' (1988: 308). It is the Eurocentric elites who speak in the name of the peasant, while the position of the subaltern remains empty (this point is fully explicated in the concluding part of the following chapter). There are all reasons to believe that in other places, such as India or Bolivia (Maia and Santoro 2013), the peasant or the native are genuine political subjects whose voice can be heard. And yet the Russian case warns against assuming these subaltern figures are anything but the pure negativity emerging in the Eurocentric discourse of the elites. The reconstruction of the voice of the subaltern must be a product of the case-oriented intellectual work, not of the researcher's assumptions.

The empty spot behind the discursive figure of the peasant also sheds additional light on the subaltern imperial resentment that I described in

the first sections of this chapter. Russian imperial discourse is thoroughly Eurocentric, and yet the imperial legacy defers Europeanisation: it puts Eurocentrism on its head by defining Russia as the exact opposite of the West, with no in-between elements. This invites another look at Ayşe Zarakol's research on stigma, thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2. She describes stigmatisation as 'the internalisation of a particular normative standard that defines one's own attributes as undesirable' (Zarakol 2014: 314). In the case of Russian paleoconservatism, however, such attributes, incompatible with the hegemonic normative order, are deliberately constructed as defining Russia's identity – not by promoting alternative values but by inverting the hegemonic norm. Moreover, it could be argued that it is the emptiness at the core of Russian anti-Westernism which makes it so radical and uncompromising. If there were a positive difference between Russia and the West, a difference that Russia tried to defend as its native legacy, it would indicate a possibility of mutual accommodation. After all, we do live in a post-colonial epoch – 'post-colonial' with a hyphen, an epoch where Orientalist zeal has been replaced by political correctness. Were Russia to locate within its own imperial space an element that would constitute a genuine native challenge to Eurocentrism, a set of anti-historical memories that resisted appropriation by global capitalism, there would be a way of securing these memories from Western 'mimetic violence' and opening a space for 'dialogical politics' (Sakwa 2013c, see also Sakwa 2013a).

When, on the contrary, difference is defined as pure negativity, there can be no ground for dialogue. It is impossible to accommodate the Other if the Other is defined as a pure negation of the Self. Any borderline is contested, because it is the contestation, and not the borderline, which ensures the existence of the Self in this Eurocentric outlook.<sup>8</sup> As a result, any compromise can only be temporary, because as soon as Russia ceases to antagonise the West, it immediately faces the empty spot in the place where its identity is supposed to be located. Any 'reset' forces Russia to see itself for what it is – a dependent country whose only hope consists in trying to 'catch up' with the hegemonic core. The vicious cycle of deferred Europeanisation starts again, leading to resentment and eventually a new round of antagonism.

# 5

## The People Are Speechless: Russia, the West and the Voice of the Subaltern

This chapter comes back to the issue of the representation of the subaltern, which was formulated in the beginning of the book. Empirically, I illustrate this problem by analysing the most recent developments in Russian politics, both at the domestic and international level. The phenomena I am primarily interested in are the dramatically intensified securitisation of the West in the aftermath of the 2011–12 political crisis and the intervention in Ukraine after the Euromaidan revolution of February 2014, which inter alia resulted in the annexation of Crimea. My argument is that, firstly, all of these developments are driven by the same logic – the logic of subaltern empire that is going through a period of instability and insecurity. As a subaltern, it feels threatened by what it perceives as an expansion of the Western empire, which through a series of ‘colour revolutions’ is consolidating its hegemonic position in world affairs. This feeling of insecurity provokes a series of defensive moves, some of which have already been described in the previous chapter. Indeed, the conservative turn in Russian politics can be read as an attempt to seal off the domestic ‘cultural space’ from Western intervention. Apart from that, it translates into repressive measures against ‘the fifth column’ – those groups who are identified as representing the dangerous Western Other in the domestic political space.

On the imperial side, the same logic leads the Kremlin to undertake what might appear as an offensive in the post-Soviet space, particularly in Ukraine. However, I argue that this behaviour is driven by the same defensive logic that produces the repressive conservative turn domestically. This is not a reductionist claim in the sense of trying to identify *the* explanation for Moscow’s aggressive course. Rather, my reasoning suggests that subaltern imperialism is the best general frame that enables one to account for the synergy of different factors behind the



overdetermined phenomenon of Russian foreign policy. I see it as compatible, in particular, with Shogo Suzuki's (2009) and Ayşe Zarakol's (2011) conceptual frameworks, whose starting point is the problem of late socialisation into West-dominated international society. However, the frame of subaltern empire enables one to better account for the contradictory nature of Russia's international standing than relying solely on stigma or on the idea of dual international society.

Having outlined my interpretation of current Russian political evolution as an instance of subaltern imperialism, I move on to demonstrate some paradoxical consequences of this phenomenon for the political subjectivity of the Russian people. In order to do that, I engage with the poststructuralist interpretation of politics, relying, in particular, on Jacques Rancière and Andreas Kalyvas. I demonstrate that in Rancière's terms developed Putinism is grounded in a disavowal of politics. As such, it suppresses the political subjectivity of the Russian people as potentially destructive. This analysis brings us back to the postcolonial perspective: by putting the Russian case in a wider global context, one concludes that the people in Vladimir Putin's Russia find themselves in the same position as the subaltern in Gayatri Spivak's writings, being constantly spoken for and thus silenced. This dual suppression of subjectivity – in the sense of the disavowal of politics and containment of popular subjectivity – paradoxically leaves only one subject on the horizon of Russian politics. The name of this subject is the West, and its discovery completes the picture of Russian subaltern imperial Eurocentrism that I have been drawing for the entire length of this book.

### **Securitisation of the West and the end of postcommunism**

In his 2009 book, Sergei Prozorov argued that postcommunism was a particular historical condition, which consisted in the suspension of politics and thus could be described as the end of history. In contrast to Francis Fukuyama's (1992) eschatological interpretation of this Hegelian concept, Prozorov's reading follows that of Giorgio Agamben (see, in particular, Agamben 1993, 2000, 2005). Prozorov maintains that the rupture of the linear, chronological time with the collapse of the Soviet Union manifested itself in the 'lingering of the political, a paradoxical perpetuation of the foundational moment of postcommunism for almost a decade, when the revolutionary origin of the new regime remained visible' (Prozorov 2009a: 45, see also Prozorov 2004).

According to Prozorov, the 1990s in Russia was the time of total political openness: all conceivable scenarios of political development

remained possible, but were suspended by Boris Yeltsin's constant manoeuvring, which did not allow any hegemony to consolidate. This peculiar form of depoliticisation continued, albeit in a different form, with the arrival of the new leader:

During the 1990s Russian politics was a diffuse spectacle of hegemonomies and counter-hegemonomies, reforms and counter-reforms, rises and falls, all of which were a priori thwarted in their ability to achieve any finality and therefore were only of interest to their participants, not the society at large. In the Putin period, this spectacle gave way to an austere hegemony of nihilistic technocracy, which a priori forecloses the possibility of a political event. Rather than mobilize the population for a historical task of any ideological direction, Putin's regime merely contributes, through restrictions on and repression of civic activity, to the societal exodus from politics that started immediately after 1991. . . . Perhaps, someday this will be known as the 21st-century 'Russian idea' – an 'impotentialization' of power through a paradoxical synthesis of the acceptance of the majesty of sovereignty and the prohibition on its exercise.

(2009a: 78)

Hence, Prozorov views Putinism as ushering in 'a time without tasks, divorcing human existence from the imperative of work and letting it be in the form of "whatever being", constrained neither by identity nor vocation' (Prozorov 2009a: 84; cf. Agamben 1993, 2000). In the tradition originating in Agamben's philosophy, this reading would be optimistic and even apologetic, but this normative agenda does not concern us here. Instead, this chapter concentrates on the issue of political subjectivity and in particular of the subjectivity of the subaltern. If Prozorov's account of Putinism as suspension of politics is adequate, even if only in terms of locating the limit which a political form tends to, this invites the question of whether Russia might indeed be able to someday withdraw from the centuries-old opposition to the West which has defined its identity. The previous chapter suggests that such a withdrawal is not really an option: Russia continues to exist in the uncomfortable position of an outsider in the Western-dominated normative order. This leads to resentment, and one must therefore enquire whether this resentment in the end could be capable of producing and consolidating a subaltern subject that would challenge Western hegemony.

Generally speaking, Prozorov's reading of Putinism as a form of post-communist suspension of politics probably has to be qualified in at

least a couple of ways. Firstly, Juan José Linz (2000) argues that non-ideological rule, combined with the passive obedience of citizens and their withdrawal into the private domain, is a common attribute of all authoritarian regimes and a prominent feature differentiating authoritarianism from totalitarianism. This does not invalidate Prozorov's observation that a suspension of politics befell Russia already under Yeltsin, since back then it worked in a peculiar way in still allowing for the struggle between various ideologically defined hegemonies. Against this background, early Putinism looks like a normalisation of sorts, with Russia becoming a typical authoritarian country where the suspension of politics implies de-ideologisation and apathy, rather than frantic (in)action.<sup>1</sup>

This leads to the second reservation: throughout the post-Cold War period, the suspension of politics was itself suspended by the construction of the West as a threat in the Russian security discourse. This enemy image remained on the margins during the brief period of Westerniser hegemony at the turn of the 1990s but made a quick comeback and since then varied in intensity (Morozov 2009: 315–82). Even as domestic politics steadily degenerated into 'the vertical of power', the presence of the Western interventionist Other still made the suspension of politics under Putin relative and incomplete.

The above observations by no means invalidate Prozorov's reading; rather, they suggest possible reinterpretations in case a different perspective is adopted, more explicitly focused on the international. Indeed, Prozorov is just one among many authors who argued during the previous decade that Putin's regime was best described as depoliticised (Prozorov 2005, 2007, Makarychev 2008), pragmatic (Tsygankov 2006: 127–66) and 'postideological' (Kraev 2011: 8). Such descriptions were undoubtedly true but only worked within a certain system of coordinates, defined by the internal Russian discourse. As soon as Russia confronted the West on such issues as Chechnya, human rights or 'colour revolutions', the ideological nature of 'sovereign democracy' was immediately revealed (Morozov 2008: 167–8). Facing the hegemon, Russia became aware of its subaltern position in the Eurocentric world, but this world was the only one available to the Russians: their memory and identity were firmly embedded in the historicist narrative. As I showed in the previous chapter, this generated a substantial amount of resentment and finally led to intense securitisation of Western interventionism.

The limits to the applicability of the 'suspension of politics' formula can also be temporal: thus, one is tempted to ask whether the political

crisis of 2011–12 has led to an end of the end of history and to the return of sovereign politics in Russia. Securitisation of the West, which works as the main source of legitimacy for the authoritarian consolidation and which is really unprecedented in the history of post-Soviet Russia, might indeed indicate the beginning of a new era. I find it convenient to refer to this stage of Russia's political evolution as 'developed Putinism', thus following Richard Sakwa's (2013b: 3) explicit analogy 'with the "developed socialism" proclaimed during the mature phase of the Brezhnev era in the 1970s'.

While the Ukrainian events of 2014 clearly mark a watershed in Russia's relations with the West, security discourse under developed Putinism does not contain any new themes compared to the previous periods. Rather, it is the relative importance of various issues, combined with the intensity of securitisation, which make it possible to speak about a qualitative change. Thus, prior to 2011, status- and honour-related concerns and geopolitical projects that derived from Russia's great power identity (Clunan 2009, Larson and Shevchenko 2010, Tsygankov 2012b) might have been a priority for Russian policymakers. After the Ukrainian 'orange revolution' of 2004, 'hostile intervention in domestic affairs' moved much higher up on the list of potential threats (Ambrosio 2007, Duncan 2013). It was probably around this moment when survival and self-perpetuation of the regime took unquestionable priority over all other political tasks.

Characteristically, the feeling of vulnerability, which had accompanied Russia's subaltern trajectory throughout the post-Soviet period, intensified at the moment which was interpreted in Russia as Western intervention in its imperial backyard. Once again, as in the previous chapter, we are observing a dialectical dynamic between these two aspects of Russia's identity, where lasting normative and material dependency intensifies post-imperial resentment. Moreover, it creates a certain interpretative pattern for geopolitical developments further afield: thus, the Arab spring was perceived as yet another manifestation of Western interventionism (Hill 2013); this, in turn, paved the way for the alarmist reaction to the Russian urban protests of 2011–12 and then to the uncompromising position on the Syrian issue (Allison 2013a, 2013b).

While the 'colour revolutions' of the previous decade had been taken as signs of a potential *risk* to the survival of the regime, the urban protests were perceived as a symptom of an imminent, genuine threat. Preventing outside intervention became the key prism through which the Kremlin views nearly all items on the agenda, domestic as well as international. The repressive turn in domestic politics, exemplified

by the *Pussy Riot* trial and the *Bolotnaya* case,<sup>2</sup> was an outcome of the same dynamic where the domestic and the international were closely connected.

This attitude has also been reflected in the growing importance of the Internet for Russian security thinking. Here, again, the West has always been perceived as the main potential aggressor, but the approach that has crystallised since 2012 interprets these threats almost exclusively through the prism of domestic politics. Technical experts argue that the main vulnerabilities lie in the sphere of infrastructure (Kaspersky 2013). Political leadership, on the contrary, insists on the need to secure domestic political space against any attempts to 'rock the boat' from the outside: hence the preference for the term 'information security', rather than 'cyber security' or 'cyber defence' (Chernenko 2013). According to Putin's article outlining the foreign policy agenda of his third presidential term, web-based technologies and social networks were used as instruments of outside manipulation during the Arab Spring, and Russia is also vulnerable to such interventions (Putin 2012f). Even when the authorities are trying to address technical vulnerabilities, they clearly concentrate on securing the autonomy of the Russian cyberspace: thus, the reliance of Russian telecommunication networks on imported equipment and the ensuing possibility of hostile action on the part of other states are considered a priority in comparison with non-state-related threats such as cybercrime (Balashova 2014). The main thrust of these efforts, however, is directed towards establishing stricter control over online content and communication. This became particularly visible after the annexation of Crimea and the sanctions imposed on Russia by the Western powers: the laws adopted by the Russian parliament during the spring session of 2014 (see Hawes 2014 for a brief overview) indicate that the Kremlin is serious about fencing off its sovereign domain in cyberspace.

The innate tendency of Putinism for total control over all aspects of social life has congruently translated into what was described by the ruling party as the 'nationalisation of the elites' (Yedinaya Rossiya, s.a.) and initially implemented in the form of the law preventing state officials from owning assets abroad (Federalnyi zakon 2013). With time, however, it became clear that 'nationalisation' was part of a wider agenda that included a crackdown on the liberal part of civil society (in particular, on the NGOs accused of being 'foreign agents'; see Lansky and Suthers 2013), banning adoption of Russian orphans by US families (the so-called anti-Magnitsky law, or Dima Yakovlev law), criminalising the 'propaganda of separatism', increasingly active

state intervention in the biopolitical domain (family affairs, sexuality, LGBT rights, etc.), multiple legal initiatives against blasphemy, 'falsifications of history', obscene language and so forth (for a summary, see Vasilchenko 2014).

It thus appears that 'nationalisation' in the face of Western interventionism, even before the Ukrainian crisis, was not a sequence of isolated policy steps, but a strategic choice based on fundamental ideological and security considerations. It stands in sharp contrast to the ideas of 'sovereign democracy' and 'nationalisation of the future', promoted by the then first deputy head of the Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov, in 2005–07 (Surkov 2006). Back then, discussion on sovereignty was needed to dismiss Western criticism and to ensure Russia's right to independently interpret universal values (Morozov 2008). Today's nationalisation, however, is a concrete policy even in its own terms, aimed at ensuring effective autonomy from all foreign influences. In the end, as Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov has pointed out, it is not just the elites, but the entire society that needs to be nationalised (*Rossiia 24* 2013).

The intervention in Ukraine and the ensuing Western sanctions brought about yet another escalation of the 'nationalisation' policies. Inter alia, personnel of security-related government agencies were effectively banned from travelling abroad (Nikolskaya 2014), a demand was introduced to clear all banking card operations within Russia through the national payment system (yet to be created), while the new law on personal data protection, which is supposed to enter in force in 2016, might significantly obstruct international travel for ordinary Russians (Krivde.Net 2014).

Apart from the security concerns, these measures are motivated by a mercantilist vision of national economic development and thus can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome Russia's economic dependency on the global capitalist core. However, one can hardly separate the economic logic from wider concerns about national sovereignty and security. Rather, all of this should be interpreted as a counter-hegemonic strategy aimed at resisting the recent developments in global economic, political and security governance.

Luke Glanville (2013) has demonstrated that the interpretation of sovereignty as centred on the principle of non-intervention was only established in international law in the twentieth century. Before that, ever since its emergence in the early modern period, it was the right to wage (just) war that stood at the core of the concept. The recent developments in international politics might indicate a trend back to

the original version, in which inviolability of internal political space is subject to the state's observation of internationally established norms. As we have seen, these trends are fiercely resisted by the Russian leadership, which sees them as Western attempts to legitimise intervention.

At a superficial glance this non-interventionist stance has been deeply compromised by Russia's recent policy toward Ukraine and in particular by the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. I would, however, argue that Moscow's position has remained remarkably consistent throughout Putin's third term, and the Orwellian transition from a non-interventionist stance to military aggression looks paradoxical only to an outside observer. It stems directly from the anti-interventionist logic described above: if the government in a neighbouring state fell as a result of an illegitimate revolt set off by a Western intervention, the Russian state has every right to intervene to minimise the damage. Given the circumstances, reinstalling the legitimate government is not realistic; therefore, the task must be to limit the geopolitical expansion of the West as much as possible. Annexing Crimea and destabilising Ukraine both serve this goal.

There are several narratives behind this reasoning, all of them woven together by the logic of subaltern imperialism. One is the story of the Holy Alliance – a combined effort of three empires (Austria, Prussia and Russia) to contain the spread of democratic revolutions throughout Europe (Jarrett 2013). This is a reference to the moment when Russia was, maybe at the one time in its entire history, a leading European power, whose relative backwardness was masked by achievements in foreign policy. Another narrative, repeatedly invoked by Putin (most forcefully in his 'Crimean' speech, Putin 2014a), is about Ukraine never having been a 'proper' state, its statehood resulting from a historical accident. This theme relates to the intimate connection between Ukraine and Russia's imperial identity and reproduces the denial of the independent standing to the Belarusian and Ukrainian people in the tsarist empire (Etkind 2011). Finally, the narrative of the threatening Western expansion, as outlined above, is also very tangibly present. All of these narratives express a mixture of post-imperial nostalgia and subaltern resentment, emanating from the dialectics of subaltern and imperial elements of Russian identity. There is, however, another dimension of developed Putinism, which is of no lesser importance for the understanding of the current turn in Russian politics. It has to do with the idea of politics as such and with the problem of the political subjectivity of the Russian people.

## Popular sovereignty and politics of the extraordinary

One of the constitutive elements of Putinism is the consistent disavowal of politics. This statement is not just empirical but conceptual: its validity clearly depends on the definition of politics and its differentiation from other domains of the social. As a formally defined contest between political parties for control over state institutions, or even as a space for rational deliberation between civilised human beings (Habermas 1998), politics in Russia continues to exist. Moreover, the existence of the political as a specific domain of societal life is explicitly invoked by the authorities: thus, in the controversy over the foreign-funded NGOs, their participation in the political process constituted the very essence of the phenomenon that the law was supposed to regulate by obliging them to register as 'foreign agents'. Characteristically, it was the alleged political nature of their activities that was vehemently disputed by most activists. Thus, it would seem that the authorities were actually trying to expand the sphere of the political into such a seemingly depoliticised domain as human rights protection. As I will demonstrate below, this apparent expansion was also a facet of the depoliticisation, but the concept itself needs to be introduced first.

The interpretation of politics which informs my analysis is devised in opposition to the liberal procedural approach and relies on contemporary post-foundational political thought (Marchart 2007). Firstly, this implies that politics unfolds as a process of subjectification and representation. According to Jacques Rancière (1999: 87), ever since the emergence of the *demos* in Ancient Greece, the people (as a political singularity) has been in a state of permanent difference from itself, 'the difference between man and the citizen, the suffering-working people and the sovereign people'. This statement is not that far away from Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of the temporality of 'national representation' as necessarily 'double and split':

the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the People as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.

(2005: 208–9)



In contrast to Bhabha's deconstructive reading (see also Krishna 2013), Rancière's affirmative vision of democratic politics postulates that political subjectification, and hence politics as such, consists in giving a sovereign form to the unrepresented masses. The constitutive split, however, is always there: subjectification can be achieved momentarily, but its completion once and for all would mean the end of politics in the eschatological sense of the word, history played out to completion. In my subsequent analysis of politics and its disavowal in contemporary Russia, I will stick to the post-foundational vocabulary, which is much more advanced for dealing with this set of issues. I will bring the discussion back to the postcolonial problematic towards the end of the chapter.

Rancière's treatment of the problem of subjectification goes back to Karl Marx and his idea of the proletariat as 'that class that is not one' and 'as the name of the universalizing subject of wrong' (Rancière 1999: 89). In the words of Slavoj Žižek (1999: 188), who summarises Rancière, the concept of politics 'designates the tension between the structured social body in which each part has its place and "the part of no part" which unsettles this order on account of the empty principle of universality – of what Balibar calls *égaliberté*, the principled equality of all men *qua* speaking beings'. This interpretation of the political directly contradicts the liberal procedural definition by prioritising the constitutive mission of politics – giving voice to the elusive universality of *the people* – over the deliberative dimension.

Secondly, the post-foundational understanding of politics draws on Carl Schmitt's (2005) interpretation of a political decision as its own sole foundation, which does not need to be grounded in anything else – be it human nature, tradition, morals or religion (see also Hirst 1987). Post-foundationalism reconsiders Schmitt's conservative philosophy in the spirit of Derridean deconstruction. As Jacques Derrida himself puts it, political decision is always excessive in relation to the identities and norms that define the situation in which it takes place: 'A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect or determinate causes' (1988: 116). As such, a political decision is always about subjectification and representation. In as much as it is political, it deals with the universal (the common good, the national interest) and thus constitutes the political community in whose name it is taken, rather than simply translating a pre-existing 'will of the people' (cf. Kapustin 1996, Edkins 1999). In achieving that, the decision also has to solve, for the moment, the problem of representation. The locus of

the decision, be it the parliament of the revolutionary crowd, is where and what the people *is*, at this very instance.

One crucial aspect of Schmitt's decisionism is the differentiation between sovereign exception and the politics of the extraordinary, which is highlighted by Andreas Kalyvas (2008: 94–6). Whereas commissarial dictatorship is a form of constituted power, constitutive power comes before any law and establishes the order itself: 'The sovereign decision is an absolute beginning, and the beginning (understood as *αρχή*) is nothing else than a sovereign decision. It springs out of a normative nothingness and from a concrete disorder' (Schmitt, quoted in Kalyvas 2008: 94). It is in this constituent power that the democratic subjectivity of the people reveals itself most fully and gives origin to all subsequent politics and governance (Kalyvas 2008: 96–100). Correspondingly, democratic governance always keeps trace of the extraordinary: it 'leaves room for a supplement, a surplus of democratic practice that cannot be fully included into formal constitutional procedure' (Möllers 2007: 87).

Kalyvas (2014) criticises Rancière for a tendency to dismiss ordinary politics as the domain of the *police*, 'the established social order in which each part is properly accounted for' (Žižek 1999: 188) – technocratic, depoliticised and potentially oppressive. As highlighted by a number of authors, Schmitt himself proposes a 'tripartite division of the constituent power of the people': 'people being *anterior and above* the constitution, *within* the constitution, but also being a people *beside* the constitution' (Spång 2014: 3). To better frame this argument, Kalyvas comes up with the metaphor of the popular sovereign, the subject of democratic politics, having 'three bodies, each marking one of the three different locations it occupies and the distinct roles it performs in relation to the instituted order' (2008: 298).<sup>3</sup> The first is the people directly present on the historical scene as a constituent power, the source of law and order. Constituent power is, however, rare and unstable; extraordinary politics needs to be normalised, instituted into a procedural democracy. Normalisation produces the second body of the people, where it is no longer directly present, but rather represented through institutions (elections normally play the key role in this process).

However, in ordinary politics there is always an inherent risk of forgetting about its own democratic foundations:

If the main threat for the first moment is a permanent revolution, the ever-present menace for the second one is stagnation and juridification. A routinized, purely procedural and autonomous legal and

political system seriously jeopardizes the possibility of spontaneous action and political freedom. While the moment of foundations suffers from the consequences of a surplus of freedom, the second moment suffers from a deficit of freedom.

(Kalyvas 2008: 262)

Hence, there is always the need for the third moment: extraordinary politics must remain 'an irreducible outside' of any order, 'a reminder that instituted reality does not exhaust and cannot consume all forms of political action, which often emerge at the edges of the existing statist *nomos*' (2008: 297). Kalyvas further explains:

In this version, the sovereign is not fixed in a natural, normless state but rather emerges from informal, extraparliamentary self-organized spaces. . . . During moments of ordinary politics, the citizens might continue to exist not only in mediated forms channelled by various devices of representation but also in more direct, physical and concrete extra-institutional organized forms'.

(2008: 299)

As Mikael Spång (2014: 4–5) observes, '[i]n elaborating on what radical democracy entails today, most theorists do not take up a revolutionary perspective. . . . The history of modern revolutions shows that they easily spiral out of hand and turn against themselves ("revolutions eating their own children")'. However, the revolutionary legacy is crucially important for contemporary democratic thought, while both theory and democratic constitutional practice do their best to preserve the efficacy of constituent power in its other forms (for a good snapshot of the debates, see Loughlin and Walker 2007). The irreducible revolutionary potential of all extraordinary politics is recognised and accepted as an important element of the 'checks and balances' even in such countries as Germany, where, for historical reasons, constitutional power is strongly safeguarded vis-à-vis constituent power (Möllers 2007).

The essence of developed Putinism, on the contrary, consists in pushing the counter-revolutionary agenda to the limit: all extraordinary politics is equated with revolution, and therefore rejected and suppressed. This is a core common element between Putinism and many other anti-modern ideologies. Indeed, as Gerard Delanty (2007: 3069) concludes, it is only possible to sum up the idea of modernity by pointing to its core predicament: 'Modernity may [...] be described simply as the loss of certainty and the realization that certainty can never be

established once and for all'. It is this realisation that is vehemently resisted by paleoconservatives, who seek to ground politics in finite truth – religious, moral or scientific.

### **Putinism as disavowal of politics**

As the previous section already indicated, the essence of developed Putinism is not captured by describing it as overcentralised power (Martyanov 2007) or even by pointing out that popular sovereignty has been personified in Putin as the only political figure in the country (Shevtsova 2009). The model of the 'vertical of power' does not stop at redistributing political influence: it eliminates politics as the sphere of communal decision-making, leaving in its place only the two extremes. On the one hand, there is the sovereign power of the supreme leader who operates in a permanent state of exception (which, it will be recalled, derives from within the existing order, not from extraordinary democratic politics). On the other hand, the executive in its everyday managerial activity has absorbed the other branches of power and turned them into instruments for the implementation of the sovereign will. Moreover, the recent repressive turn in legislation and law enforcement indicates that ideally, the Kremlin would like to see civil society in the same position. This trend towards total control became obvious already during the early stages of the construction of the 'vertical of power', in particular after the 'colour revolutions', and resulted in the first round of significant amendments to the NGO law in 2005 (Ambrosio 2007). Rhetoric softened somewhat during Dmitry Medvedev's modernisation campaign, but a deeply conservative attitude, resulting in mistrust towards grassroots activism, can also easily be detected in the former president's statements (Morozov 2010a). The onset of the political crisis after the 2011 parliamentary elections led to yet another round of restrictive policies.

A more nuanced view of the concept of depoliticisation, developed by Rancière, could help make sense of the inner logic of developed Putinism. Rancière speaks about three types of 'disavowals of the political moment' (see also Žižek 2006: 186): archipolitics, parapolitics and metapolitics.<sup>4</sup> Archipolitics, for Rancière, is epitomised by Plato's republic: it is an organic image of the polis 'in which the order of the *cosmos*, the geometric order that rules the movement of the divine stars, manifests itself as the temperament of a social body' (Rancière 1999: 68).

Archipolitics is at the core of Putinite paleoconservatism, which advocates a wide range of measures aimed at fixing the existing social

identities and preventing 'the part of no part' from ever emerging on the political horizon. What is important to stress here is the manner in which paleoconservative archipolitics routinely deprives entire social groups of a legitimate voice. For example, the rationale of the 'anti-Magnitsky law', preventing Russian orphans from being adopted by US citizens, is the myth that the metaphysical bonds of ethnicity would ensure a better future for these Russian children in Russia, even though foreign adoption would guarantee superior standards of care. Alexander Kondakov (2014) demonstrates how the construction of 'heteronormative citizenship' results in the silencing of LGBT citizens. Last but not least, both Andrey Shental (2013) and Grigory Revzin stress the archipolitical view behind Russia's 'new cultural policy'. According to Revzin (2014), this policy is based on a form of cultural Darwinism, which views culture as 'a biological organism, whole and non-contradictory. Ideas, images, value systems which come from other cultures are considered in this picture as viruses, which the organism resists thanks to its immune system'. Biologisation of culture is probably the most radical manifestation of the archipolitical disavowal of politics, since it reduces difference to an incontestable 'fact of life' and thus banishes all undecidability from the internal space of the nation.

Parapolitics for Žižek consists in 'the attempt to depoliticize politics (to translate it into police logic): one accepts political conflict, but reformulates it into a competition' (Žižek 1999: 190). Yet, in Rancière's original formulation, to which Žižek only refers in an endnote, this originally Aristotelian logic is supplemented by the distinctly modern logic of the social contract (for which Hobbes and Rousseau are the two key sources). The latter re-invents the human being as an individual, simultaneously correlating individuality with state sovereignty and highlighting 'the discrepancy between the sovereign people and the people as a party', between the abstract universality and the particularities that claim to embody it (Rancière 1999: 75–81, quote from p. 81).

In the former interpretation (politics as competition), the depoliticising effect of parapolitics is clearly distinguishable everywhere, perhaps even more so in established democracies than in hybrid and authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, Russia offers an almost perfect example of the cumulative depoliticising effect that the interplay between the Hobbesian and the Aristotelian logic can have if parapolitics is allowed to play out unchecked. While the 'systemic opposition' is constantly engaged in petty fights that barely mask the cynicism and corruption beneath the thin layer of official politicking, the awesome figure of the sovereign prudently directs the process from above. One of his

key functions, once again, is to ensure the policing of political space and to prevent subversive elements from breaking the integrity of the social body.

This was how Putinism had operated before the crisis that started in late 2011. The crisis itself, however, demonstrated the other side of parapolitics. While the 'tautology of sovereignty', which 'rests solely on itself', presupposes a radical alienation of freedom in favour of the sovereign and thus the elimination of the people *qua* people, it nevertheless names equality as its key foundational principle. This, in turn, makes it possible for the people to 'emerge as the entity that must be presupposed for alienation to be thinkable and finally as the real subject of sovereignty' (Rancière 1999: 78–80). It was exactly such an attempt to reclaim sovereignty that is evident in such slogans of the 2011–2012 protests as 'We are not the opposition, we are the people' or in Aleksei Navalny's motto: 'We are the power here' ('Мы здесь власть') (Magun 2014b, Laruelle 2014b).

In an attempt to neutralise this powerful challenge, the regime falls back on metapolitics, which plays a central role in framing the Kremlin's conduct both domestically and internationally. This form of disavowal of politics is less conspicuous than archipolitics, but has profound effects, in particular as far as Russia's position on the Ukrainian crisis is concerned. Metapolitics postulates the superstructural, epiphenomenal status of politics as mere representation vis-à-vis the hidden truth of the social – the truth of what is 'really' going on in society. The initial metapolitical impetus comes from Marx and his noble assertion, most notably in *On the Jewish Question*, of emancipation as 'the truth of free humanity outside the limits of political citizenship'. However, in the next step, the free man whose humanity is not conditioned by citizenship (and thus by the state) is substituted for 'man of civil society, the egotistical property owner, matched by the non-property owner whose rights as a citizen are only there to mask radical nonright' (Rancière 1999: 83). In the end, this attempt to reveal the true nature of things beneath the screen of representations leads to a disavowal of politics by equating it with ideology – 'the word that signals the completely new status of the true that metapolitics forges: the true as the truth of the false' (Rancière 1999: 85).

The truth of the false is probably one of the most enduring legacies of the Soviet era's vulgar Marxism, which made a fetish out of Marx's critical stance by taking the bits that were not properly reflected upon in the original teaching and elevating them into a quasi-religious dogma. This is a constant theme in Russian political discourse, which is obsessed with

revealing the real 'things' hidden beyond the representational 'appearances'. The most obvious manifestation of the metapolitical search for the truth of the false are conspiracy theories, which abound in the Russian debate. Conspirological 'explanations' are popular with all parts of the political spectrum and include such claims as, for instance, that Russia is governed from Washington, that, on the contrary, Russian politics is a show organised by the secret services, that the Russian opposition is a puppet of Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia, that the protest movement was created by the 'systemic liberals' around Medvedev and that the unexpected success Navalny's anti-corruption crusade has been plotted in the Kremlin.<sup>5</sup> Western policies towards Russia in this view also originate in various behind-the-scene schemes: thus, the international criticism of the Russian law prohibiting the 'propaganda of homosexuality' has been described by its author, Vitaly Milonov, as resulting from the fact that the gay lobby had infiltrated the most important international institutions (Wilkinson 2013: 6).

The propensity to present both the Ukrainian Maidan and Russian Bolotnaya as plotted in Washington certainly belongs to the same metapolitical tradition. As pointed out by Lev Gudkov, director of the most respected independent centre for the study of public opinion, official propaganda 'imposes the most cynical of all possible interpretations of the [Ukrainian] developments: this is all politicking, the struggle of interest... They are all bastards, politics is a squabble of interests groups and no-one can be trusted' (Gudkov 2014). The annexation of Crimea prompted a much wider circulation of these clichés not just in the mainstream media but also in the academic discourse. Thus, the editorial introduction to the March 2014 issue of *Вся Европа* ('All of Europe') journal, published by Moscow's MGIMO University, accused the EU of committing a 'forgery' when 'operating in terms of [universal] human values, solidarity and freedom, which are sacred for the Europeans':

In practice, the screen of nice words and noble goals masked a troglodyte desire to expand one's sphere of influence, to subjugate the countries of the shared neighbourhood, to tear away from Russia the peoples with whom we had for centuries lived together as one, creating common culture, common history, common politics.

(Entin 2014)

One can easily detect here the opposition between 'true', organic unity of the Russian empire, framed archipolitically, and the metapolitical denunciation of Western policies as rooted in hypocrisy. It stems

directly from the Putinite outlook, which is insightfully described by a Russian-American journalist:

They truly believe that there is an American conspiracy afoot to topple Putin, that Russian liberals are traitors corrupted by and loyal to the West, they truly believe that, should free and fair elections be held in Russia, their countrymen would elect bloodthirsty fascists, rather than democratic liberals. To a large extent, Putin really believes that he is the one man standing between Russia and the yawning void.  
(Ioffe 2014)

The true of the false is present here in all its diversity: as conspiracy, as corruption, as helplessness and ineptitude of the people, whose political involvement can produce but a disaster. What this description also very aptly hints at is the awe that Putinists feel in the face of politics proper – ‘the yawning void’ which opens up when all contingent institutional props are discarded and the self-foundational nature of the political decision is revealed in all its discomfiting bottomlessness.

The latter attitude is certainly not unique to Putinism (and generally speaking, Rancière’s critique is of course that of liberal democracy, not of Putin’s Russia). The counter-revolutionary spirit of neo-liberalism, which prefers to channel discontents through established institutions even when the latter have lost their original political meaning, is definitely a mark of our age. From a certain viewpoint, Putinism could be read as an inflated caricature of this typical neo-liberal attitude. This is also the basis for the Kremlin’s legitimist view of national sovereignty, according to which revolutionary uprisings, being necessarily a product of outside intervention, cannot yield any legitimate authority. Paradoxically, a by-product of this logic is the conviction that the principle of sovereignty, understood as *non-intervention*, can still justify intervention in another state’s affairs. If a popular uprising in Ukraine, instigated from abroad, has ousted the legitimately elected president, it becomes not just the right, but the duty of neighbouring states to intervene to restore law and order and thus to offset the consequences of the original intervention.

Another facet of metapolitical depoliticisation literally impersonates ‘the scientific accompaniment of politics’ (Rancière 1999: 85) in the figure of ‘the politologist’ (*no.nu.mo.lo.gos*). The original meaning of the word, the Russian for ‘political scientist’, has been compromised by too many members of the profession engaging in primitive spin doctorship, to the extent that many real scholars have started to shy away from



the label. The public irritation with the craft of 'politology' has been expressed by Navalny when he promised that in the New Russia (presumably a democracy) all 'politologists' to a man will be fed to wild animals in the zoo (see Belkovsky 2013).

However, regardless of the social prestige or stigma associated with the profession, the primitive realist interpretations of politics promoted by spin doctors have undoubtedly contributed to mass disillusionment, which, in turn, makes it easy to discredit the opponents of the regime. The use of 'kompromat' (compromising materials) against political opponents is definitely nothing new or unique for Russia, but the effectiveness of this weapon is certainly remarkable. Starting with the Yukos affair, which destroyed 'the oligarchs' as a group whose political influence did not depend on the state, and all the way down to the most recent cases, this tactics relied on the metapolitical common-sense understanding that politics is a dirty business and that any public figure either acts as a puppet, engages in corrupt deals, or both.

When the truth of the false becomes an established social fact, there is an obvious danger of it being turned against the regime, including the political leadership. The potential effectiveness of this weapon has been demonstrated by the same Navalny, who came to the spotlight as a populist corruption fighter. Such a reversal, at least in its initial moment, certainly is a political act, since it reopens the gap between man and the citizen and argues that the current embodiment of sovereign power is a corrupt regime that represents no one but the private interest of those in power. The regime's response to such challenges, as described above, has consisted in a combination of metapolitical demoralisation and archipolitical hyper-moralism – a combination which is not that paradoxical, given the organic link between the two logics that is demonstrated by Rancière (1999: 81ff). At the same time, the appeal of archipolitical policing, based on the idea of every identity being tightly knit into an organic order, is greatly enhanced by intense securitisation – or, if one accepts Žižek's addendum to Rancière's three-pronged construction, by ultrapolitics.

For Žižek (1999: 190), ultrapolitics is

the most cunning and radical version of the disavowal [of politics]... the attempt to depoliticise the conflict by bringing it to an extreme via the direct militarization of politics – by reformulating it as the *war* between 'Us' and 'Them', our Enemy, where there is no common ground for symbolic conflict.

Žižek (2006: 187) is right to point out that Carl Schmitt's original definition of the political, in spite of the seminal role it played in contemporary post-foundational thought, gravitates towards ultrapolitical disavowal of politics by essentialising the fixed boundary between inside and outside and thus presenting the nation as the only thinkable locus of political subjectivity. He also correctly describes archipolitics and ultrapolitics as 'two faces of the traditionalist attitude' (Žižek 2006: 188), since in order to securitise the outside, the inside must be conceived of as an organic and homogenous whole. This might even suggest that ultrapolitics is just a radicalisation of archipolitics, with the potentiality of the former always already present in the latter – in the same way as the potentiality of war is always present in Schmitt's definition of the political.

Regardless of where we draw this conceptual distinction, however, it is obvious that the ultrapolitical radicalisation of communitarian, paternalistic view of the Russian nation is one of the main tools the regime uses for its survival. The form has been there since at least the Kosovo crisis of 1999 (Morozov 2002), while the formula 'the enemy is at the gate' was actively employed by, *inter alia*, Vladislav Surkov in his advocacy of 'sovereign democracy' (Lynch 2005). It also explains the simultaneous upsurge of anti-Westernism and the intensification of state intervention in the biopolitical domain after the recent urban protests: archipolitical postulating of an organic community must come before ultrapolitical securitisation, because the outside that is securitised must be clearly defined against the inside in the first place.

In sum, the political landscape of developed Putinism, in its own terms, includes two main protagonists: the silent people whose main function is to legitimise the regime in a periodical act of voting and the Hobbesian sovereign who is the political incarnation of the people and the Master of the latter's alienated freedom. The sovereign then establishes the police order where every spot is fixed in accordance with the communitarian logic of archipolitics. Civil society, which is ordered in this manner, operates in a parapolitical mode, mostly as groups of loyal citizens who, each in their own place, do their best to serve their Fatherland. There are, however, certain corrupt agents who put their private interest before the common good (metapolitical logic operates here); some of them have sunk so low as to allow themselves to be bought over by the hostile foreign forces (a transition back to archipolitical logic and its radicalisation through ultrapolitics). The sovereign will protect the people from any hostile intervention, provided that the people, as citizens, keep moral integrity and resist

subversive external influences. Having clearly defined the mechanisms of Putinist disavowal of politics in Rancière's terms, it is now time to integrate it into the conceptual framework of this book. This means, firstly, linking the phenomenon in question with the historical retrospective presented in the previous chapters and, secondly, checking to see how it works in different theoretical contexts, in particular, the postcolonial one.

### **The state, the intelligentsia, the people**

While the specific combination of bio- and geopolitical myths on which developed Putinism is based is probably unique, in structural terms it is a symptom of a much more enduring predicament that Russia has faced throughout its modern history. The Putinite image of the Russian nation reproduces the same split historical subject that emerged at the latest in the seventeenth century during the process of Westernising modernisation (cf. Watson 1984: 73–4). This continuity is noted by Russian novelist Mikhail Shishkin (2013) when he compares the Russia of the early 2010s and the one of the 1820–30s, the time of tsar Nicolas I and Alexander Pushkin, the foundational figure in Russian classical literature:

What was happening in Pushkin's Russia... is extraordinarily reminiscent of what is happening in Putin's Russia. In my country, we are still playing the same game with the same rules for three players: a people that (in Pushkin's words) 'exude silence',<sup>6</sup> a nascent society that demands 'Swiss' democracy and declares war against the government, and a government that is left with two options: to retreat or to tighten the screws.

Shishkin also reminds us about the political views that Pushkin developed towards the end of his life, when he had outgrown his earlier romantic non-conformism:

The study of Russia's history, the history of its czars and its popular uprisings, as well as his own healthy understanding of reality, led the poet to the conclusion that the worst that could happen in Russia is revolution, a 'pointless and merciless' uprising, and that the government is 'the sole European in our country'. Pushkin saw that in Russia the choice between dictatorship and democracy was beside the point: the only choice was between bloody chaos and ruthless order.

As stressed by Alexander Etkind, Dirk Uffermann and Ilya Kukulín, Russia's Europeanisation created an enormous gap between the educated urban elites and the masses:

as soon as they emerged as a social group, Russian intellectuals began to perceive these lands [of internal Russia, as opposed to the imperial periphery] as exotic and subject to exploration... Missionary work, ethnography and exotic travel, phenomena characteristic of colonialism, in Russia were most often directed inside its own people.

These people were familiar, they spoke 'our' language and were the source of 'our' well-being – and yet it was still exotic. Russia colonised itself, assimilated its own people.

(2012: 15)

While remaining a peripheral country, Russia – that is, the literate classes that were capable of speaking for the nation – so fully interiorised the Eurocentric outlook that it became the only conceivable way for political and cultural self-expression. This is where the awe in the face of the 'pointless and merciless' revolt comes from. Popular protest, anti-colonial by nature, did not and could not have any intelligible voice of its own, simply because education consisted in learning the language of the colonisers. As Sankaran Krishna (2013: 140) remarks, in a completely different context, 'whether or not the subaltern can speak has always seemed to me less important than the fact that if they do, as they surely do, we would be amongst the last to understand'.

This is the point where Rancière's theorising meets postcolonial thought in the most obvious way. In some of their fundamental pursuits, both are inspired by Marx, and both keep, as the anchor of their political ontology, the figure of the proletarian: a speechless 'whatever being' (Agamben 1993) whose truth is referred to, but only as inaccessible for politics, as ever receding into the anomy of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998). In Rancière, such is 'the part of no part' – the people whose truth is denied by metapolitics as ideological and false. In the postcolonial outlook, it is the figure of the subaltern, who, as we know from Spivak (1988, 1999), remains silent and inaccessible to Eurocentric reason, being voiced over by local leaders and Western intellectuals (see also Kapoor 2008: 41–59). Putinite disavowal of politics excludes 'the part of no part' by speaking for the subaltern, and it is the intellectuals who do the bulk of the talking on behalf of civilisation.

Ever since Pushkin's time, the authorities and the intelligentsia in Russia speak the same Eurocentric language, in which the people are

constantly spoken for, but never given a voice. It was the language of the European Enlightenment, and it was centred on the values of individual autonomy and popular self-determination. It thus implied a much greater role for the people than the empire was ready to allow. However, the Enlightenment also offered a solution to the problem: its historicist paradigm constructed non-European people as immature, not yet ready for self-government. The loyalist, 'statist' discourse in Russia has rarely been openly anti-democratic: rather, it was a Eurocentric discourse of deferred democratisation, a colonial discourse of a civilising mission among the savages.

The logic of the authorities was transparent for the intellectuals, while the people were a mystery. As a result, the Russian intelligentsia has always had split consciousness, torn apart by three incompatible truths. Some of the intellectuals embraced the government's position; others denied the insurmountable cultural difference between Russia and Europe and demanded 'Swiss democracy' here and now; still others believed in Russia's 'unique way', which would follow the superior moral authority of the 'people's soul'.

Leaving aside the ultrapolitical radicalisation that happened under Putin's third term, his regime is based on an attitude to politics remarkably similar to what probably constituted the discursive hegemony in Russia under Nicholas I. In this view, the proponents of 'Swiss democracy' are irresponsible intellectuals who promote dangerous Western ideas, while the state is the true 'subject of modernity', whose mission is to properly civilise the people as modernity's object (cf. Chakrabarty 2000: 40). As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, even in its anti-Western 'soft power' offensives, the regime remains locked in a mimetic mode of self-representation that seeks to justify each and every move by references to the presumably universal Western norm. The obvious difference from the Indian case as it is described by Chakrabarty consists in the fact that by introducing universal suffrage immediately after independence, India moved beyond the Eurocentric image of the peasant as 'not yet' ready for political self-governance (Chakrabarty 2000: 9). Russia, on the contrary, remains locked in the essentially postcolonial dilemma, with its elites being mistrustful of 'the peasant' and determined not to let the people directly intervene in politics. Rather, the elites continue to speak *for* the masses, very much in accordance with what Greenfeld (1992: 261) describes as the elitist, authoritarian attributes of Russian nationalism.

To repeat yet another thesis of the previous chapter, the framing of the 'transition to democracy' in the 1990s as catching up with and

imitating the West, rather than as the Russian people asserting its own autonomous political existence, probably made the Putinist disavowal of politics almost inevitable. The split historical subject of subaltern empire shies away from politics proper. Instead, what we observe is an endless circular movement: popular sovereignty is always deferred because the historicist paradigm sees the people as immature, whereas the educated elites are busy arguing whether Russia should be civilised through mimicry or negation.

All of the above necessarily leads to the following question: if asserting Russia's historical subjectivity by denouncing Western hegemony is the main source of legitimacy for Putinism, is there a chance that it will eventually do away with Russia's subaltern position vis-à-vis the West? It is obvious that there is no hope for democratic politics in Putin's Russia and that any future self-assertion will probably lead to more repression at home and more aggression abroad. But could this be the cost the Russians and their neighbours have to pay for the Russian nation finally casting off the chains imposed on it by several centuries of peripheral, dependent development? The remaining part of this chapter will argue that Putinism is politically sterile and can in no way give birth to a new historical subject. In fact, the only subject of Russian history, as it is framed by the Putinite discourse, is the West.

### **The West as the subject of Russian politics**

It will be remembered that in post-foundational political theory, subjectification is seen as a quintessentially political phenomenon: since the people is not identical with itself, it has to be constituted, as sovereign subject, in every political move. Besides, the subject is defined in opposition to the structure, but this opposition goes beyond the agency–structure problem as it is posited in sociology and international relations (IR) theory. In most accounts,<sup>7</sup> agency and structure are seen as mutually constitutive: 'rules make agents, agents make rules' and as the very term 'agency' suggests, agents act 'on behalf of social constructions' (Onuf 1998: 60, 62).

Subjectivity, on the contrary, is associated with a structural rupture, the 'gap filled in by the gesture of subjectivization (which, in Laclau, establishes a new hegemony; which, in Rancière, gives voice to the "part of no part"; which, in Badiou, assumes fidelity to Truth-Event; etc.)' (Žižek 1999: 158). This is also true in relation to Žižek's own understanding, which is informed by his Lacanian psychoanalytical outlook and thus identifies the subject with 'the gap, the opening, the Void

which precedes the gesture of subjectivization' (Žižek 1999: 158–9). As Charlotte Epstein explains, the Lacanian subject is a split subject, because it 'straddles... two realms, the immediate, preverbal realm of desire on the one hand, and the intersubjective, mediated realm of language where desire finds expression and the self is made on the other' (Epstein 2011: 335). Finally, this resonates with Vivienne Jabri's (2014: 381) interpretation of postcolonial subjectivity, which is associated with the 'destabilising moment in the constitution of "hybrid" discursive formations [which] might be said to derive, following Bhabha, from created spaces that are neither of one nor the other'.

Regardless of certain important conceptual differences between these accounts, they all insist on the opposition between the subject and agency: the former is understood as either meta-structural or emergent, while the latter is secondary in relation to either the structure itself (as in Onuf above) or to the subject (as in Jabri 2013). My own position is closer to that of Alain Badiou (2001, 2005), who, *contra* Lacan, resists 'ontologization of the subject' and refuses to treat it as 'an entity con-substantial with the structure' (Žižek 1999: 159). As Epstein (2011: 343) admits, 'Lacan's analysis emphasizes the sheer complexity of the dynamics of a highly individual phenomenon (identity), and consequently the difficulties in taking this level as the starting point for analysing all other levels at which identity is politically at play'. She proposes to bracket subjectivity for the purposes of IR and to concentrate instead on subject positions, which are 'identities *minus* subjectivities'.<sup>8</sup> However, this operation remains at the level of the existing political order, in which the subaltern normally has no voice, 'the part of no part' does not exist. While such bracketing might be acceptable and even desirable for certain purposes, in the end it neutralises the foundational critical impulse of the postcolonial studies project, which was, after all, directed at giving the subaltern some voice, at least by proxy. Hence, subjectification needs to be envisaged 'as the ontology-defying move wherein the postcolonial subject of politics, now conceived as "object", is not fully captured in concepts, suggesting an uncapturable excess wherein potentiality and the moment to come are also constitutive of the subject' (Jabri 2013: 80).

At least two significant points arise from these diverse approaches to subjectivity. Firstly, the subject always emerges under particular structural conditions (what Badiou calls 'a situation') but goes beyond it, reveals an excess and, in doing that, changes the situation as such. As Jabri infers from her analysis of hybrid subjectivity in Bhabha's writings, the impact of decolonisation on the international went far beyond the emergence of new candidates to join the expanding

international society. Rather, 'the very presence of the postcolonial transforms the international into a postcolonial international, one where any colonising move would from henceforth be a matter for contestation' (2014: 382).

Secondly, the subject can never be defined in any formal (e.g. institutional or racial) terms, because doing that would inscribe it in the language of the situation and thus eliminate the excess of subjectivity (or, in Lacanian terms, suture the gap which is the subject). From this perspective, Jabri's turn to the materiality of racial difference in Fanon (see Chapter 1 and Jabri 2014: 383–5) as a way of 'radicalising' Bhabha might actually look as going in the opposite direction, towards the conservation of the existing situation. We are probably better off staying with Bhabha and his emphasis on the deconstructive potential of hybridity. His reading of Fanon's 'negativity' as defying the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, as using 'the fact of blackness, of belatedness, to destroy the binary structure of power and identity' (Bhabha 2005: 340), as Jabri (2014: 382) rightly points out, suggests the interpretation of postcolonial subjectivity as 'non-identity'. Thus, 'the part of no part' finds its place in the interstices of postcolonial politics.

If we apply this conceptual matrix to the situation of developed Putinism, the first conclusion must be that the unreserved disavowal of politics by the regime is a sovereign intervention whose purpose is to reinforce the structure. The sovereign can thus be described as an agent (in Onuf's terms) but hardly as a subject. This is not only because subjectivity cannot be defined by formal criteria but also due to the fact that the very nature and mission of Putinism consists in blocking the emergence of the subject. As an embodied sovereign, the president functions in the state of exception, but it is still a constituted power, a commissarial dictatorship tasked with the preservation of the existing order by containing the extraordinary power of the people. It reduces the sovereign autonomy of the Russian people to the narrow limits of presidential politics, claiming, as Putin repeatedly does, that the president has the mandate of the Russian people to define the national interest and implement policies on its basis. It is a very narrow understanding of popular sovereignty, close to how Schmitt preferred to see it: 'For Schmitt, the sovereign people cannot speak or deliberate, they can only shout and acclaim. This formulation obviously threatens the entire edifice constructed precisely to permit effective popular rule' (Kalyvas 2008: 182–3).

The Putinite discourse describes the mission of the presidency as consisting in preserving stability, and thus preventing any genuine political



change. It advocates organic development from within the ontological premises of the current situation, while any excess is externalised by ultrapolitical means. All attempts to go beyond the postulated organic cosmos of the nation are classified as manifestations of extremism, which, in the final analysis, originates outside and thus is dangerous for the order within. Meanwhile, gradual development and incremental improvements are achieved in the parapolitical paradigm of technocratic management, where any bold political choice is consciously avoided.

It turns out that Russia needs sovereign autonomy as a means of escaping from politics. It is autonomy that is claimed for the sake of inaction, sovereignty wanted in order to do nothing at all. This phenomenon, once again, is not unique for Russia. In the South American context, it is designated by the term 'gatopardism', rather prominently established in the discourse (Pavlova 2013: 94). The origins of the term are usually traced back to *The Leopard (Il Gattopardo)*, a novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1988: 17): 'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.' It thus refers to political leaders who do not really want to lead anywhere, whose action is aimed at avoiding social change rather than achieving it.<sup>9</sup>

In the Latin American context, gatopardism is a strongly negative term used as a weapon against political opponents. In Putin's Russia, on the contrary, inaction seems to have been raised to the status of political virtue. This is how this position has been summarised by a prominent member of the Kremlin media pool, Andrey Kolesnikov of *Kommersant*: 'for Vladimir Putin, stability, lasting for years, is a result in itself, not a means for achieving some other result (i.e. a means of development). And the investment, which might come to Russia as a consequence of stability, is the investment in the future stability' (Kolesnikov 2013).

One might suggest that Putinism blocks subjectivity within the domestic political space in order to safeguard Russia's subjectivity as a nation (cf. Pavlova 2013). Indeed, it might be tempting to describe Russia's role in postcolonial terms as a nation located in an interstice, both an empire and a colony, a deeply dislocated identity which disrupts the hegemonic order every time it tries to uphold it. There might be some truth in this description. However, being a troublemaker is hardly sufficient to qualify as a subject. As we saw above in Jabri's reading of Bhabha, the emergence of the postcolonial subject 'transforms the international into a postcolonial international'. This is again about an excess that is inherent in the concept of subjectivity: the subject changes the world once and forever. I do not see Russia's position in the

international society, with all the inherent hybridity and dislocation, as being productive of such an excess, even momentarily.

However, moving further along the path charted by postcolonial studies, we do find a political subject within the domain of Russian politics. From Rancière's perspective, this finding might be somewhat unexpected, because this subject is located, in conventional terms, outside of Russia proper. Its presence, however, becomes almost self-evident as soon as one accepts the categorisation of Russia as a subaltern empire. The name of this subject is, of course, the West.

From the point of view of post-foundational political theory, the West looks rather as a surrogate subject which acts as such only within the distorted representation of the situation by the Putinite discourse. According to this image, the sovereign is working hard to make sure that things remain as they are, while the West exercises 'mimetic violence' (Sakwa 2013c) by breaking in and trying to destroy Russia. The aim of this subversive activity is to plunge Russia into the unknown future, expose it to open-ended politics of the sort it experienced in 1990s. The West is therefore constantly in excess of the organic archipolitical cosmos of Russia as imagined by Putinists. Outside the Putinite view, however, the West is no more than a constant presence, a constitutive outside whose individual attributes (usually grossly exaggerated) figure as negative terms defining a particular version of Russia's identity. As such, the presence of the West serves to stabilise the situation, rather than to move beyond it, and thus true subjectivity must be sought elsewhere.

It is at this point that the postcolonial optic might offer a different reading of the situation. The subaltern position of Russia in the current international system makes the West a key reference point for all politically relevant discourses, both pro-regime and oppositional ones. Being a perfect case of subaltern Eurocentrism, Russia has not only colonised itself on behalf of the capitalist core but also internalised the hegemonic outlook to the extent where the negation of the West becomes the only possible platform for Russia's claims to the status of alternative modernity. In the place of the postcolonial 'native' or 'peasant', the guardian of anti-historical memories defying the homogenising logic of capitalism, Russia has but an empty spot, a mirror image of the West.

Thus, the Putinite discourse adopts the same historicist perspective as its Westerniser opponents. It shares the view of modernity as 'a bounded and definable phenomenon' which unfolds in predefined stages, leading to the conclusion that 'some people are more modern than others' (Chakrabarty 2000: 9). The only difference between the Westernisers

and the paleoconservatives in this regard is that the former argue that modernisation is something every nation must strive for, while the latter embraces 'tradition', understood as a direct reversal of modernisation. The linear logic remains in place, only the directionality changes. In practice, as revealed by multiple discursive mappings (discussed in the second chapter), there is a range of relatively sedimented discourses which position Russia's 'true' identity at various points in this linear time – in the pre-modern times, in the Soviet past or in the future shaped by the West. Putinite discourse might oscillate between these nodal points, but this does not change the binary historicist logic, which seeks to eliminate all excess, exclude any supplement which Russia's rich history might be able to offer. Consequently, Putinism operates within the Eurocentric world view in which the West is, writ large, *the* subject of global history.

It is ironic that Kamran Matin (2013b: 364) criticises Chakrabarty for conceding 'world-transformative agency . . . to Europe as the unmoved prime mover' and thus overlooking 'crucial world-reordering changes in, and by, non-European societies'. Regardless of whether this criticism is fully justified or not in relation to any particular postcolonial scholar, it certainly captures the metapolitical outlook of developed Putinism, which denies subjectivity to all non-Western peoples, including its own subjects, and even to itself. It is the West that produces historical time as such, while the task that is left for Russia is to define which direction in this time is the right one. Paleoconservatism claims that the right direction is always opposite to the one taken by the West at this particular moment, and therefore it cannot avoid referring to the foundational Eurocentric concepts, such as 'civilisation' or 'Europe'. These reference points provide a normative sanction to policies which otherwise would have no ground to rely upon, sinking into the empty spot at the core of Russian imperial identity.

The way the West enters Russian politics is determined by the domestic context, particularly by the disavowal of politics in which the regime consistently engages. 'The native' or 'the peasant', which is the bearer of true subjectivity in the postcolonial perspective, is deliberately silenced by Putinism: the people are prevented from entering politics not only through repression but also through the metapolitical relegation of politics to the domain of the false. Instrumental logic of regime survival, which is certainly in operation here, is embedded in a much broader system of signification, outside of which the very existence of the regime would be meaningless and illegitimate. In this broader perspective, the government positions itself as 'the only European' in Russia and silences

the people in the name of civilisation. The regime undertakes to ensure orderly and progressive development and claims that the only alternative is the collapse of any order, 'the pointless and merciless Russian riot'. In other words, the Russian subaltern empire keeps on colonising itself on behalf of the Western hegemonic core, even as it claims to mount an uncompromising assault on the legitimacy of the hegemon.

This brings us back to the question of representation of the subaltern. It seems that the whole structure of the global discourse, shaped by the opposition between liberal universalism and peripheral relativism à la 'sovereign democracy', makes it impossible for the subaltern to speak. Russia's internal colonisation continues in a new form: the Russian people finds itself in the position of colonised natives, caught between 'the ferocious standardizing benevolence of most U.S. and Western European human-scientific radicalism (recognition by assimilation)' (Spivak 1999: 281) and domestic authoritarianism, which speaks in the name of the subaltern only in order to silence them.

In her analysis of the outlawing of *sati* (widows' self-immolation) by the British in India in the 1820–30s, Spivak demonstrates how the emergence of subaltern subjectivity is blocked by two paternalistic discourses, which she sums up in two sentences: 'White men saving brown women from brown men' and the nativist 'culturalist' claim, 'The women wanted to die' (Spivak 1999: esp. p. 287). The same is happening with the subjectivity of the Russian people today: the benevolent liberal West tries to protect the Russians from their own government, while the latter maintains that all that the Russians actually want is a strong hand like Putin's. The people, in the meantime, remain speechless, and the reason for that is not just the lack of free media or electoral manipulations. When the subaltern cannot speak, it is usually due to the fact that her 'unheeded subjectivity' finds no appropriate representational device. It remains extraneous to the hegemonic discourses, but too powerless and too heterogeneous to project an independent voice.

Postcolonialism locates subaltern subjectivity in the interstices and associates it with the ability to subvert and destabilise the oppressive structures. However, in the Russian case, the purpose and significance of subversion is exactly the opposite to what the 'classic' postcolonial discourse seeks to achieve. Posing as an emancipatory project giving a voice to the subaltern, Russian paleoconservatism is deliberately designed to silence the Russian people and to ensure the preservation of the current regime. As such, it constitutes the main ideological component of the current repressive course that the Russian government is taking by cracking down on the freedom of speech and artistic expression,

outlawing certain lifestyles (homosexuality) and introducing prison terms for 'abuses' of freedom (classified as libel, hooliganism, drug use, sacrilege, etc.). 'The Russian people', whose interests the government claims to protect, plays the same role as the 'much-invoked oppressed subject (as Woman), speaking, acting, and knowing that gender in development is best for her'. In the meantime, the real people living under a corrupt and incompetent authoritarian regime remain that very 'unheeded subaltern' whose history must unfold 'in the shadow of this unfortunate marionette' (Spivak 1999: 259).

It is by no means a given that the people of Russia, were they to succeed in achieving sovereign subjectivity, would be able to move beyond the Eurocentric linear time imposed on them by subaltern empire. As far as one can see, there is nothing in the current debate that would indicate an excess, a possibility to break away from the vicious circle of identification with and negation of the West that has shaped the modern history of Russia. Yet, if there is hope, it lies with the people and not with the authorities – political as well as intellectual. As Chakrabarty (2000: 45) powerfully argues,

since 'Europe' cannot after all be provincialized within the institutional site of the university whose knowledge protocols will always take us back to the terrain where all contours follow that of my hyperreal Europe – the project of provincializing Europe must realize within itself its own impossibility. It therefore looks for a history that embodies this politics of despair ... I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenships in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity.

The politics of despair is indeed the best we can achieve from within the university, which by definition works with encyclopaedic language and cannot produce any excess. If there is hope, the reasons for it lie outside the ivory tower. This is not an optimistic statement: as I have stressed many times in this book, it is wrong to idealise 'the people' as a given entity out there, existing separately from the state and the entire global capitalist order. The emergence of a popular subject is indeed blocked in Russia by the Eurocentric hegemony, which imagines the country as exotic and its people as barbarian and rebellious. Yet, this pure native, uncontaminated by the imperial element of Russia's identity, is in itself an orientalist myth, regardless of whether it is imagined as

uncivilised and fearsome or noble and worthy of compassion. Rosalind Morris is right in her bold statement: 'There is neither authenticity nor virtue in the position of the oppressed. There is simply (or not so simply) oppression' (2010: 8). Moreover, the subaltern can themselves be complicit in oppression by identifying with the empire, cheerfully giving their own voice away in exchange for the phantom freedom of imperial pursuits and even acting as the empire's agents. These individuals and groups are subjects of empire, but they are not (yet) the people as a sovereign political subject.

Any hegemonic order is decentred. In the Russian case, this decentring is plainly visible: the hard power is concentrated inside the national political space, but the Eurocentric rules of the game are beyond its reach. With the West being the only subject of Russian politics, there is currently no subjectivity on the inside – only its systematic disavowal. The hope is in the fact that there *is* something to be disavowed, a potentiality of politics inherent in postcolonial hybridity as such. The very idiom of democratic politics, which Putinism, in its preoccupation with 'civilisation', has to mimic in a rather respectful way, implies the irreducible presence of 'the part of no part'. By invoking 'the people' on a daily basis, the regime reminds its subjects about the dignity they have lost by staying speechless. By remaining oppressed, one deserves compassion, but hardly more. It is the audacity of moving beyond the subaltern position, by reclaiming politics and reinventing human solidarity, which brings the people back to the forefront of history.

# Conclusion

In the mid-August 2014, as my manuscript was nearing completion, I came across a remarkable interview on an independent St. Petersburg-based news resource. What made the piece noteworthy was first of all the personality: Alexander Nevzorov burst into the media scene in the late 1980s with his blockbuster news show *600 seconds*, which was strongly oppositional to the Soviet and, later, Russian authorities. During the 1990s, Nevzorov was a soldier of the empire: he fought against the government during the Moscow riots in 1993 and on the pro-Russian side in nearly all armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space. In parallel, he produced strongly propagandistic documentaries, full of pro-Soviet nostalgia and demonising the anti-imperial forces, from Chechen separatists to pro-Western liberals. He was elected to the Duma in 2000 and re-elected for three more consecutive terms, but kept a much lower profile throughout the 2000s, having immersed himself in horse breeding. During the presidential campaign of 2012, Nevzorov became one of Vladimir Putin's authorised representatives and currently keeps this status, despite being an outspoken opponent of the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Eastern Ukraine. He claims he has cleaned himself of the 'imperial addiction': he supports the Ukrainian government in its military offensive against the separatists, while most of his friends fight on the other side, and a few of them have been killed. Paradoxically, he says he still supports Putin.

In other words, Nevzorov knows Russia inside out, and his own biography could work as an illustration for this book. He has been with his country in war and in peace, sailed back and forth across its ideological landscape, with and against the current. What he says in this interview is important, but even more symptomatic is what he does not and cannot say. Inter alia, he strongly insists on Russia's Europeanness:

If we look around, what is Russian in what we observe? ... You will tell me – novels and the Russian literature. But these all are Western forms. All is borrowed. ... If we try to find something Russian – in the Black-Hundred sense, in today's ideological sense – we will find nothing. ... We are Europe. And all culture we have is only European culture.

The reader will note that this is one of the core arguments that this book puts forward: Russia has internalised the Eurocentric outlook to the point where it became totally dominant. All alternatives boil down to aggressive anti-Westernism devoid of any positive agenda. Nevzorov does not spare harsh words to condemn this imperialist stance:

we have the only Russian idea: about the third Rome, special way, spirituality ... In one word, all that which sooner or later ends with someone's guts being reeled in on [tank] trucks ... This chauvinist, Black-Hundred 'Russian idea' results in a war against Russia's own people, or in a war against another people. But beside this Russian idea, there is another Russia. ... It is completely different. This Russia is always in the position of a stepdaughter in our own territory. This is a Russia which strives for normality, to civilisation, to mother Europe.

(Nevzorov 2014)

As most concerned observers, Nevzorov sees these two Russias, the imperial and the civilised, as mutually exclusive. This is where I disagree: I believe that there is only one Russia, which is European and, in its own way, civilised. Contrary to what Nevzorov suggests, civilisation presupposes, rather than excludes, periodically reeling in someone's guts on tank trucks. It is not this which makes Russia less 'civilised' and isolates it from the community of European nations. The boundary is not just ideological but political, in a strong sense of the term, and also economic. It results from the uneven and combined development of global capitalism, in which Russia participated as a peripheral country. Russia was a European colony, but unlike many others, it was colonised by its 'own' sovereign state. This created a society with a colonial economy and social structure, but imperial identity and ideology. There is a subaltern element in Russian nationalism, but as any true subaltern, it does not have a voice. Instead, it is being spoken for by the Europeanised elites, who invent the native in accordance with the Orientalist clichés, as a noble savage waiting to take its due place at the forefront of history.



As far as I can judge, it is this noble savage who is fighting against the European civilisation (this time represented by the Ukrainian army) in the fields around Donetsk and Luhansk. Various brands of imperialist ideology which motivate the rebels and those who help them from outside are all locked into a Eurocentric world view, while the bitterness of their struggle results from their subordinate position in the normative order which they have internalised as their own. I might be wrong: the imperialist project of Novorossiya might eventually give voice to the Russian subaltern and establish its political subjectivity in a forceful opposition to the Eurocentric global order. Most of us probably will not like what we would see, but that is exactly the point: if the subaltern can speak, they definitely do not speak in a sweet voice.

# Notes

## 1 The Postcolonial and the Imperial in the Space and Time of World Politics

1. I capitalise the words 'Self' and 'Other' when they refer to the two sides in an identity relationship. I do not differentiate between specific Others and the Other as an abstract instance (Lacan's *l'Autre* and *le petit autre*, cf. Epstein 2011: 340).
2. The conventional understanding that Gramsci was using the term as a code word for proletariat has recently been contested (see Green 2011).
3. While Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government has become increasingly authoritarian domestically (Taspinar 2014), in the international arena it has not openly challenged the primacy of liberal democracy as a universal value.
4. Here and elsewhere, unless indicated otherwise, I keep original emphasis in citations.
5. On the notion of layered discursive structure, see Wæver (2002).
6. As Vera Tolz (2011) demonstrates in her recent study, the mutually conditioned development of the imperial centre and the periphery was also established by Oriental studies in late imperial – early Soviet Russia. However, this intellectual tradition had little lasting impact even within Russia, not to mention the global debate.
7. Rumelili and I attempted to do that in a jointly written article (Morozov and Rumelili 2012); see also Yanik (2011).
8. Indeed, as Rosalind Morris (2010: 10) points out, Chakrabarty follows Spivak in his insistence that the 'antihistorical, antimodern subject... cannot speak as "theory" within the knowledge procedures of the university' (Chakrabarty 2000: 10).
9. Kamran Matin (2013a: 455) suggests, for instance, that in the Iranian case, uneven and combined development led to the revolution of 1979 being able to mobilise 'an emergent liminal sociality that combined Western and Islamic socio-cultural forms'.

## 2 Russia in/and Europe: Sources of Ambiguity

1. When providing examples of specific theoretical and methodological developments, this review only references studies which focus at least partly on Russia as an empirical case. Citing other works, even limited to the most significant ones, would only make the text less readable, without contributing much in terms of the primary line of reasoning.
2. This bias admittedly seems to be shared by most of IR scholarship (see Tickner and Blaney 2012).
3. 'Securitisation', in the disciplinary context of International Relations, refers to a speech act through which something is presented as a threat to a valued referential object. Note that while securitisation theory acknowledges that non-discursive ('objective') factors can serve as 'facilitating conditions' of a securitising move, it nevertheless brackets off the question of whether the threat 'actually' exists and concentrates on its being postulated by a securitising actor and accepted by the audience as a matter of primary political significance (see Wæver 1996, Buzan et al. 1998).

## 3 Material Dependency: Postcolonialism, Development and Russia's 'Backwardness'

1. Characteristically, the doctrine has been traced back to Putin's dissertation, defended in 1997 (Balzer 2006).
2. In the wider field of poststructuralist IR, gender has been a privileged theme (see for example, Enloe 2000, Tickner 2001). One can hardly say the same about discursive constructions of class and dependency.
3. In his recent texts, Rosenberg (2010, 2013) has tried to expand the scope of uneven and combined development to create a theory explaining international anarchy (for a critique, see Glenn 2012). This is far beyond what I need in my study, so my own interpretation is in keeping with Trotsky's original and Rosenberg's earlier writings.
4. At one point, Etkind (2011: 89) refers to the institutional economics of Douglass North et al. (2009) in describing the differences between 'the limited access' and the 'open access' social orders. While this distinction could be useful in capturing the differences between resource-oriented and labour-oriented economies, it is important to keep in mind that North's theory assumes that limited access order exists in 'the natural state', which historically has been the norm, while the development of an open access state is due to a combination of unique circumstances. Thus, it can do little to account for the uneven and combined development of societies that supply raw materials to open access economies.
5. A telling example is provided by Werner Herzog and Dmitry Vasyukov's (2010) documentary about life in a remote village on the Yenisei. Even though this community is largely self-sufficient in both economic and normative terms, it still has to rely on the typically colonial exchange of furs for industrial goods and celebrates Victory Day in a characteristically Soviet manner.
6. In bringing up 'civil society' here, I follow Rosenberg (1994), who, relying on Marx and Hegel, identifies the separation between the state and civil society as a defining moment in the development of capitalism. Using this term in the

contemporary liberal sense (as a reference to various grassroots movements) would of course be an anachronism.

#### 4 Normative Dependency: Putinite Paleoconservatism and the Missing Peasant

1. The account below is mostly based on my earlier research on the genealogy of Putin's Russia and in particular on the dialectics of the universal and the particular in Russian democratisation. For details, please consult Morozov (2008, 2009).
2. At the time when the manuscript of the book was nearing completion, Russia had been suspended from the G8 and its voting rights at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had been suspended, due to the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Ukraine.
3. A description of this outbreak as resulting from 'great power mismanagement' (Astrov 2011) is probably the most adequate.
4. *Pussy Riot* is a punk band that staged a performance in the Moscow Christ the Saviour Cathedral in February 2012. In August of the same year, three band members were sentenced to two years in prison each.
5. See Kapustin (1996) for an early – and brilliant – analysis of Russian particularism at the conceptual level.
6. In more sophisticated accounts, paying more attention to Nye's original conceptualisation, 'soft power' and 'political technologies' are considered as complementary but separate foreign policy resources (see for example Leonova 2013: 32).
7. 'Maternity capital' is financial assistance provided since 2007 to mothers who give birth to at least two children (see Slonimczyk and Yurko 2013).
8. A poststructuralist instinct would be to respond that boundaries have no other ontological foundation than antagonism and that any identity can only be defined through negation. I believe that this is true at the abstract level (for diverging views on this issue, see Mouffe 1999b, 2005, Abizadeh 2005, Rumelili 2008, Vaughan-Williams 2009, Prozorov 2011). Constitutive antagonism, however, does not have to be concentrated on one Other: a positive difference between the non-Western Self and the Western Other in fact implies that there is a gamut of negatively defined differences which define the 'authentic' content of the Self in a number of contradictory ways. As a result, the Self–Other relationship is not antagonistic as such but is shaped by an array of antagonisms and identifications. This diversity can also be observed in the Russian case, but rather as a background, whereas the direct antagonisation of the West plays the constitutive role.

#### 5 The People Are Speechless: Russia, the West and the Voice of the Subaltern

1. In the light of the previous chapter, one must also ask whether the recent re-ideologisation of the regime and attempts at mass mobilisation signify a transition from authoritarianism to totalitarianism. Suffice it to note here that in Linz's account, the existence of a mass party that unquestionably dominates over the security apparatus and other particular interests is an even

- more important feature of totalitarianism than mass mobilisation. In contemporary Russia, the secret services and the military, as well as state-controlled corporations such as Gazprom and Rosneft, probably still embody distinct and often conflicting interests groups and arguably are more powerful than United Russia. In this sense at least, Linz's criteria do not apply.
2. *Bolotnaya* is a square in Moscow, the site of violent clashes between the police and peaceful protesters in May 2012, which resulted in the criminal prosecution of a number of opposition activists. The *Bolotnaya* case refers to criminal prosecution of the participants of the demonstration. The name of the square is widely used to refer to the protest movement. On *Pussy Riot*, see footnote 4 in Chapter 4.
  3. The point of origin for this metaphor is of course Ernst Kantorowicz's (1957) two bodies of the King. As for the tripartite division, it dates back to Schmitt (see Spång 2014 for detailed analysis), but Kalyvas refers to Hannah Arendt as his main source of inspiration here, along with Schmitt and Max Weber.
  4. This framework is used also by Andrey Makarychev (2008), who relies on Žižek's interpretation of Rancière rather than on Rancière directly.
  5. For an excellent summary of Russian conspiracy theories with examples and quotes, see Kichanova (2013).
  6. Shishkin cites the proverbial ending remark from *Boris Godunov*: 'Народ безмолвствует'. Julia Ioffe's translation is very appropriate here, but in the title of this chapter and elsewhere, I use the more conventional translation by Alfred Hayes: 'The People are speechless'.
  7. In particular, in Giddens's (1984) structuration theory. Colin Wight's (2006) book, with its insistence on the irreducibility of the conscious Self, is an important exception here. He does not, however, consistently differentiate between agency and subjectivity, which leads to his putative conscious subject being slowly dissolved in the structure. To observe this, see, in particular, Wight (2006: 212–15).
  8. Incidentally, this is also what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) do in the original formulation of their poststructuralist discourse theory. This was later reconsidered by Laclau (1990).
  9. The Latin American understanding needs to be distinguished from its original Italian context, in which di Lampedusa's novel is usually quoted with a reference to Gramsci's interpretation of the *Risorgimento* as the 'passive revolution' (Morton 2007: 8). The latter process, however, 'is not literally "passive" but refers to the attempt at "revolution" through state intervention, or the inclusion of new social groups within the hegemony of a political order without an expansion of mass-producer control over politics. . . . The result was a process of fundamental social change but without an attempt to embrace the interests of the subordinate classes. . . . within a national state' (Morton 2007: 64). In contrast, gatopardism and Putinism are about avoiding, or at least postponing, any fundamental change for as long as possible.

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